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The Palimpsest

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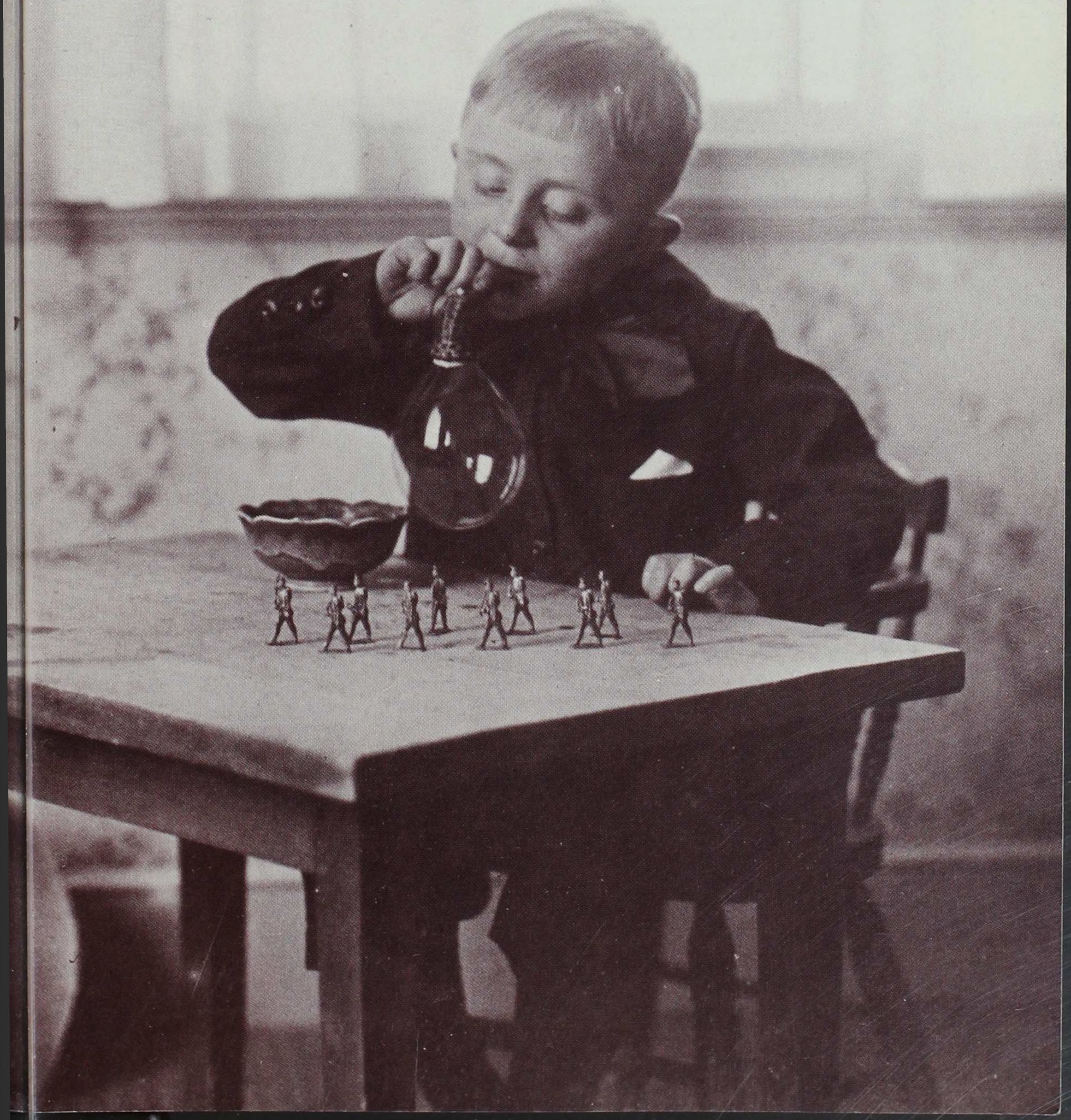
# The Palimpsest, vol.68 no.4, Winter 1987

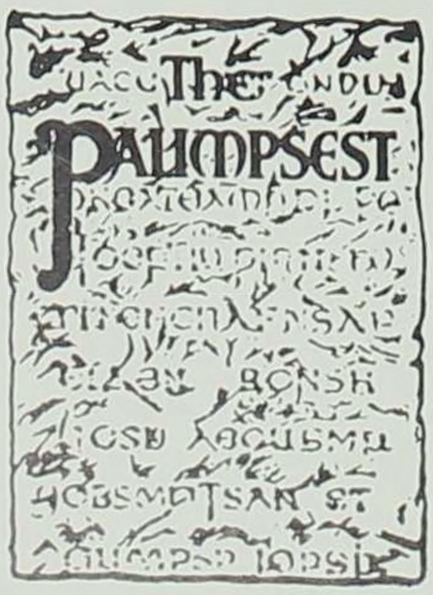
# The PALIMPSEST

Volume 68, Number 4 IOWA'S POPULAR HISTORY MAGAZINE Winter 1987



# Inside —

Through words and images, this *Palimpsest* offers several looks at childhood — a subject potentially rich with insights about how a society views children and how children reflect that society. Play activities show children mimicking adult work habits and attitudes. Toys, whether store-bought or homemade, tell us about family and home. The historical images that usually survive are the milestones — birthdays, holidays, graduations. Less often do we glimpse children's everyday life. (Above: Family picnic, Mather-Bush Collection)




## *The Meaning of the Palimpsest*

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete, and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the record of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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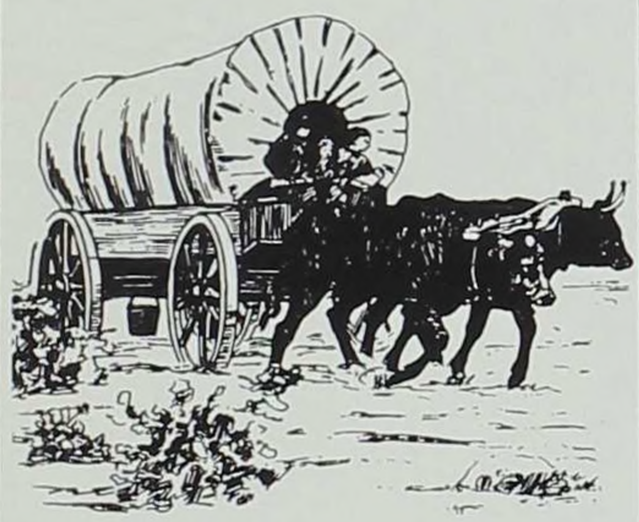
Iowa sculptor 160



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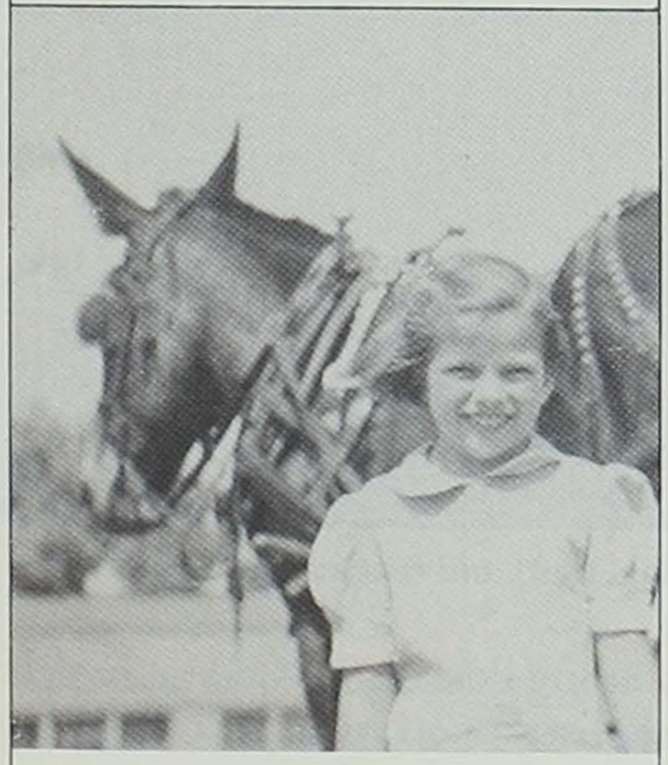

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**COVER:** Young Frederic Lord blows bubbles over toy soldiers in this 1912 photo. The photo is only one of a thousand in the Mather-Bush Collection, featured in this issue, beginning on page 174.


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IOWA'S POPULAR HISTORY MAGAZINE

**Ginalie Swaim, Editor**

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# Farm

by Joanne Meusburger

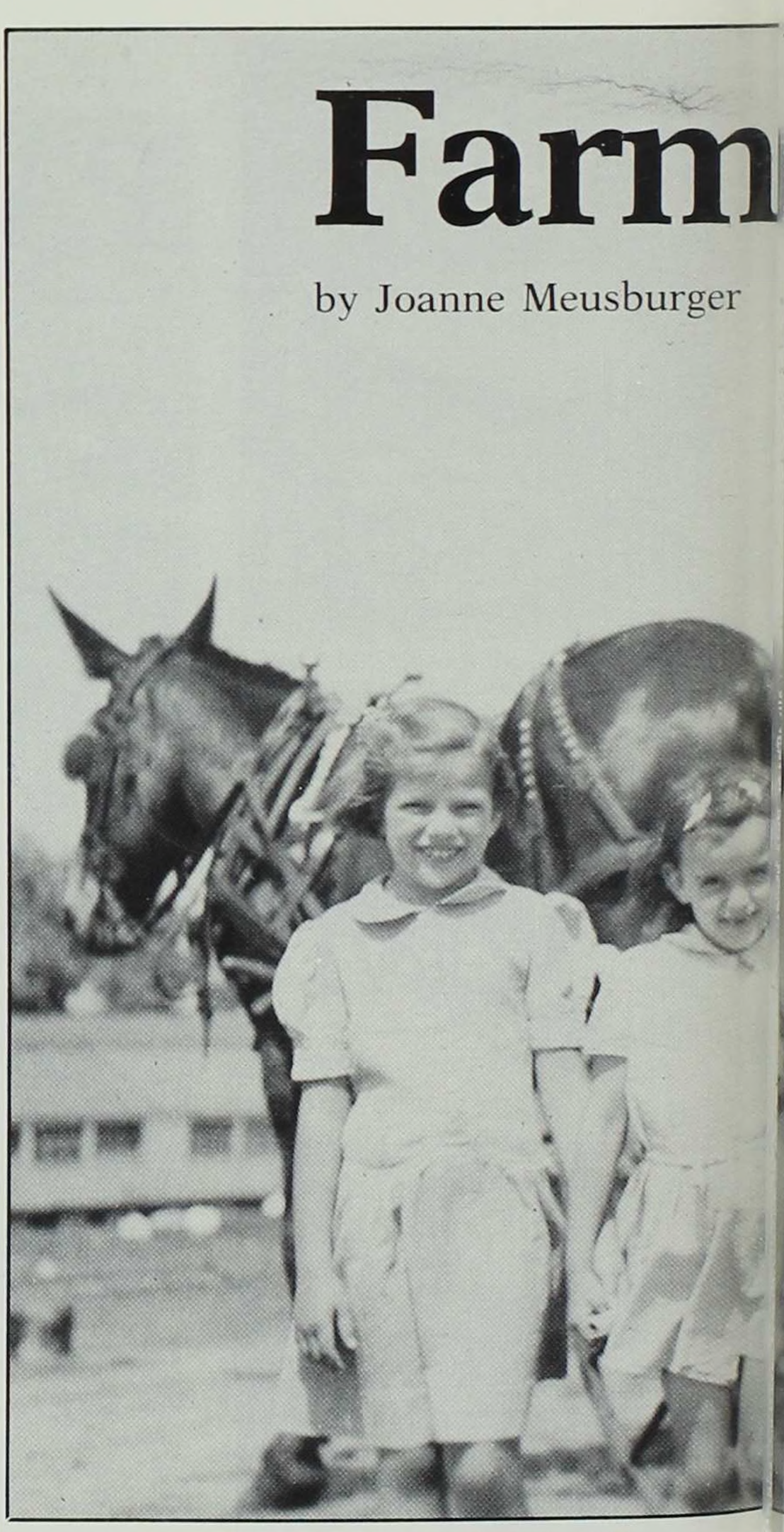
## Part 1

OUR FARM HAD BEEN in the family for three generations. It was an average farm in size, as farms go, covering 240 acres of western Iowa's Corn Belt in Sac County. My father and grandfather farmed together, raising a variety of grain crops and livestock. My father, Ronald Wilson, was a grower-producer of Pfister hybrid corn, necessitating a large warehouse for storage of the bagged seed and an office to handle sales. Besides the other usual farm buildings, there was the original frame house where my grandparents had lived when they first homesteaded the place at the turn of the century and where the hired man later resided; the large farmhouse where I lived with my parents and sister; and the smaller frame bungalow which my grandparents had built and moved into when my father and mother got married.

Growing up, I disliked being called a "farm girl." Even though I loved the lifestyle, I perceived it to be a less sophisticated frame of reference than if I had grown up in the city. As time went by, however, people asked me, "What was it like to grow up on a farm?" Sometimes I detected both curiosity and envy. Perhaps it now recalls a simpler, more innocent time when life moved more slowly and values were more clearly defined.

That doesn't mean life was boring. There was always plenty to do on a farm, but if an activity didn't present itself, my sister, Ruth, invented one.

The winter I was a baby — 1935/36 — was one of the hardest winters in Iowa history. By "hardest," most midwesterners mean that there was so much snow and bad weather that it was hard to get anywhere or do anything. Growing up, I heard tales about that winter — the snowbanks piled as high as the attic window in front of Grandma's house, and the snowplows that pushed through the roads and shoved the snow into banks as high as the telephone wires. That sounds exaggerated but Mother took pictures to prove it. The one of my



**The author as a child (left) and friends, July 1943.**

sister, Ruth, standing beside the sled on which I was bundled and strapped, won second prize in the *Des Moines Sunday Register* picture contest. By turning her back to the camera, Ruth (who was four years older than me) could have peered right into Grandma's attic window.

Not all the winters were that famous, but it did seem as though we had more snow when I was little than Iowa does now. Maybe it was because those were the days before good roads,

# Girl

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY THE AUTHOR

snow fence, windbreaks, and snow tires. We could look forward to at least four or five days of snow vacation every year because the school buses couldn't get through. It would start to blizzard during the night and we would get up in the morning to zero visibility, as though the house were on an island of clouds.

Since we lived four miles from Lytton, where we attended a consolidated school, the first thing we would do was to turn on the radio and listen to the "no-school" announcements. Ours was usually one of the last to be announced because the blizzard never looked as bad in town, so the superintendent of schools would first make a dry run with one of the buses into the country before he called the radio station.

There would also be a "line ring" for those who weren't listening to the radio. The telephone operator would ring one continuous ring on the party line and everyone would pick up their receivers to hear "There will be no school

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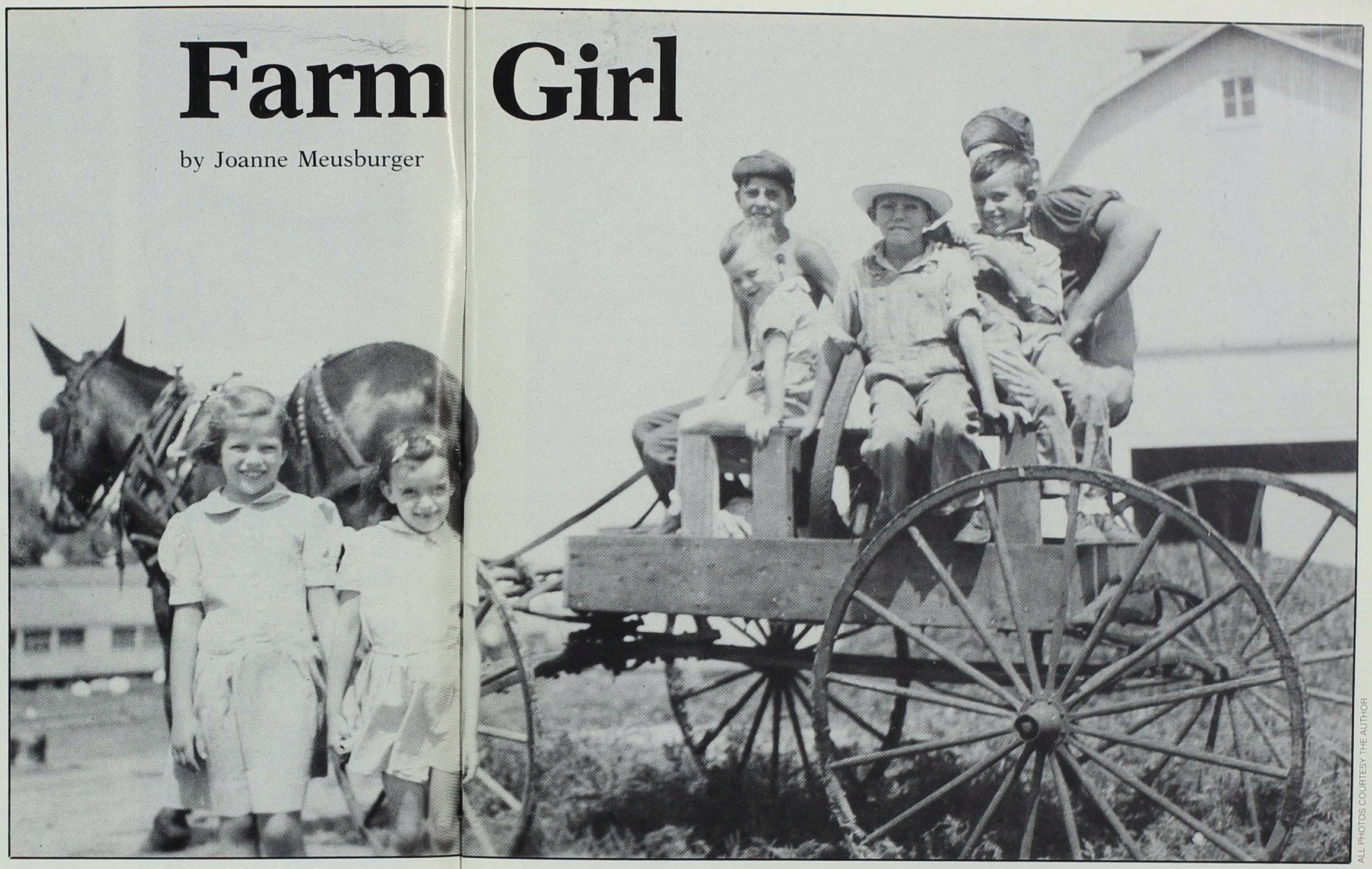

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Snow may have hindered 1940s school bus drivers, but to a child it was the material of which fairylands were made.

at Lytton today." In the worst of storms, the electricity would go out or the telephone lines would be down, and we just took it for granted that the school would be closed.

After a blizzard had stopped, Ruth and I bundled into our snowsuits and were allowed to play outside. In those fleece-lined bulky pants, jackets, and hoods, we were ready to face anything. First of all, we explored our snow fairylands. There was always the area down by the tire swing where the evergreen boughs were pulled down toward the ground under the weight of the snow. The swing would be covered with ice and icicles, and the whole picture would have a still, breath-taking quality after the fury of the storm.

After this first excursion, we were ready to enjoy the mountains of snow in every sense. We had seen it — now we would smell, taste, hear, and feel it. Some people say it is impossible to smell snow. However, I will always associate that clear, crisp air that makes your nose tingle, with new-fallen snow. Cold weather without snow is never quite the same.

With the new snow crunching under our overshoes, we would pretend we were explorers in an arctic land. Highstepping through the steep drifts, our feet would break the snow softly and then crunch at the depth of our footprints as our weight packed the snow into the firmer interior of the drift. At first, we were content just to crisscross the unblemished surface. Then we would give in to the impulse to roll in the snow, fling it about, and really explore it.

Mother would vainly warn us, "Try not to get wet!" First there would be the very explainable accident of falling down. Once wet, there was no sense in not making a thorough job of it. Snow angels came next. To create these beauties, it is necessary to stand erect and fall straight over backwards. Otherwise there will be an unangel-like depression in the vicinity of the waistline. With the impression of the body and head accomplished, all one has to do is sweep the arms back and forth at the sides to make wings. The final trick is to stand up without ruining the angel's figure or giving it oversized feet. We usually had to attempt several before we were satisfied.

With our backsides pretty well dampened, we would proceed to work on the front. If the snow was good and wet, we could make snowmen or throw snowballs. We would each make a bushel basket of snowballs and then proceed to have a war, using the snowballs as grenades. The battlefronts would be either side of a huge drift which always climbed up one side of our back fence and slid down the other. I would diligently stockpile as many snowballs as Ruth, but when the signal was given to "THROW," the differences in our size, strength, and ability to aim would result in a bombardment that forced me to use my arms as a shield rather than to hurl the sad specimens which lay crumbled in my basket.

Mother, having been through this before, would finally "Yoo-hoo" for us to come in. Mother's "yoo-hoo" could be heard almost anywhere on our 240 acres and she knew it. It was not to be ignored. Still, by the time she had swept off the caked snow on my snowsuit and pried the icy muffler from my face, it took a good fifteen minutes in front of the oven door to thaw me out.

Since the countryside was quite flat, there weren't many ready-made hills for sliding and sledding. About the only thing available to us was the mound which formed over the roof of the storm cellar. The drawback here was that the ground beside it was flat, so that once our sled had traveled the short distance down the side and off the concrete edge, it was likely to fall with a plop into the drift which so deceivingly sloped toward the fence.

Our best hope was for the weather to stay cold so that the snow would settle instead of melt. Then one of the high drifts in the garden might become firm enough to hold our weight. For this purpose, nothing worked better than a deep, shiny grain shovel. Straddling the base and gripping the wooden handle to use as a rudder, we could gather enough momentum to glide for quite a distance after reaching flat ground. The smooth surface of the metal would slip and slide this way and that, swinging us about and sometimes turning us completely around.

Sometimes when the snow had thawed a bit, the weather then turned cold, and ice ponds would form. By getting a good running start in a pair of leather-soled shoes, one could travel

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
CYNTHIA MOORE

most of the way across the pond without the benefit of blades.

One day Mother decided to join in this fun. I had gone with her to gather the eggs. As we crossed the barnyard Mother set down the pail and eyed the fair-sized pond which had formed there. "Let's try it!" she exclaimed. I needed no prodding, so off we sailed. When I skidded to a halt on the opposite side, I found that Mother was no longer beside me. Instead, she sat in the middle of the ice with one foot twisted beneath her.

Two days later the swelling had gone down enough to have x-rays and the broken bone was set. Mother said something about "slipping on the ice" and Grandma said something about "acting one's age," and I loyally kept my mouth shut. A week later we found the pail of eggs where she had set it down. I guess the blow to her ego hurt most of all.

MY GRANDMOTHER WILSON had a great repertoire of poetry. She was the grandmother who lived next door to us on the farm, and I can remember sitting spellbound while she recited "A Leak in the Dike" or "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere." My father inherited this gift and entertained us on long trips by singing songs and recalling poems passed down by memory. We begged to hear them again and again, so that in time we learned them ourselves.

We also had favorite storybooks which we liked to have read to us. One of our favorite series were the Becky and Benny stories which appeared monthly in the *Country Gentleman* magazine. Grandma cut them out and pasted them over the pages of an old book. We asked to have them read so many times that eventually we had the words memorized and could repeat a story verbatim, even knowing when to turn the page. Ruth made her first stage appearance at age three, sitting on Grandma's lap to "read" a story to the audience.

We were never shy about performing in front of others. If asked to be on the program for a community gathering, we would spend hours planning a skit or rehearsing a duet. Usually our theatrical aspirations were realized on the stage of our local community hall.

That structure was a small converted church which had been purchased from the Presbyterians and moved out to Cedar Township from Lytton when a new church had been built. It sat solidly on its stone foundation surrounded by a fence enclosing a few feet of grass on each side, beyond which cornfields stretched in three directions. Actually, there was a cornfield in front of it, too, but that was separated by the road. It was here that township members gathered for elections, Farm Bureau meetings, the annual Neighbors' Club Christmas program, and 4-H socials.

Inside, rows of screwed-down theatre seats faced a fair-sized stage. A canvas mural attached to the wall made a permanent backdrop for the platform. It displayed a pastoral scene of a winding road that wandered off in the distance bordered by myriads of flowers and very leafy trees. A wicker chair and couch, donated by someone, served as props in front of it.

To either side of the stage were the wings which also served as dressing rooms. In one of these rooms were the ropes which let down the front curtain. The ropes came across the ceiling on a pulley device and dropped down into the dressing room where they were wound around a peg on the wall. Because of its antiquity and habit of lowering itself unevenly, this curtain was used only for drama productions. Then it

took a strong adult to handle its heavy weight and unpredictable movements.

The entire curtain was rolled onto one long roller which stretched across the width of the stage. As each foot of the canvas came into view, the advertisements of various merchants were revealed. Some of the establishments were still in business and others were already outdated. In the center of the curtain, another country scene appeared. This time there was a stream and a log cabin among the flowers and trees.

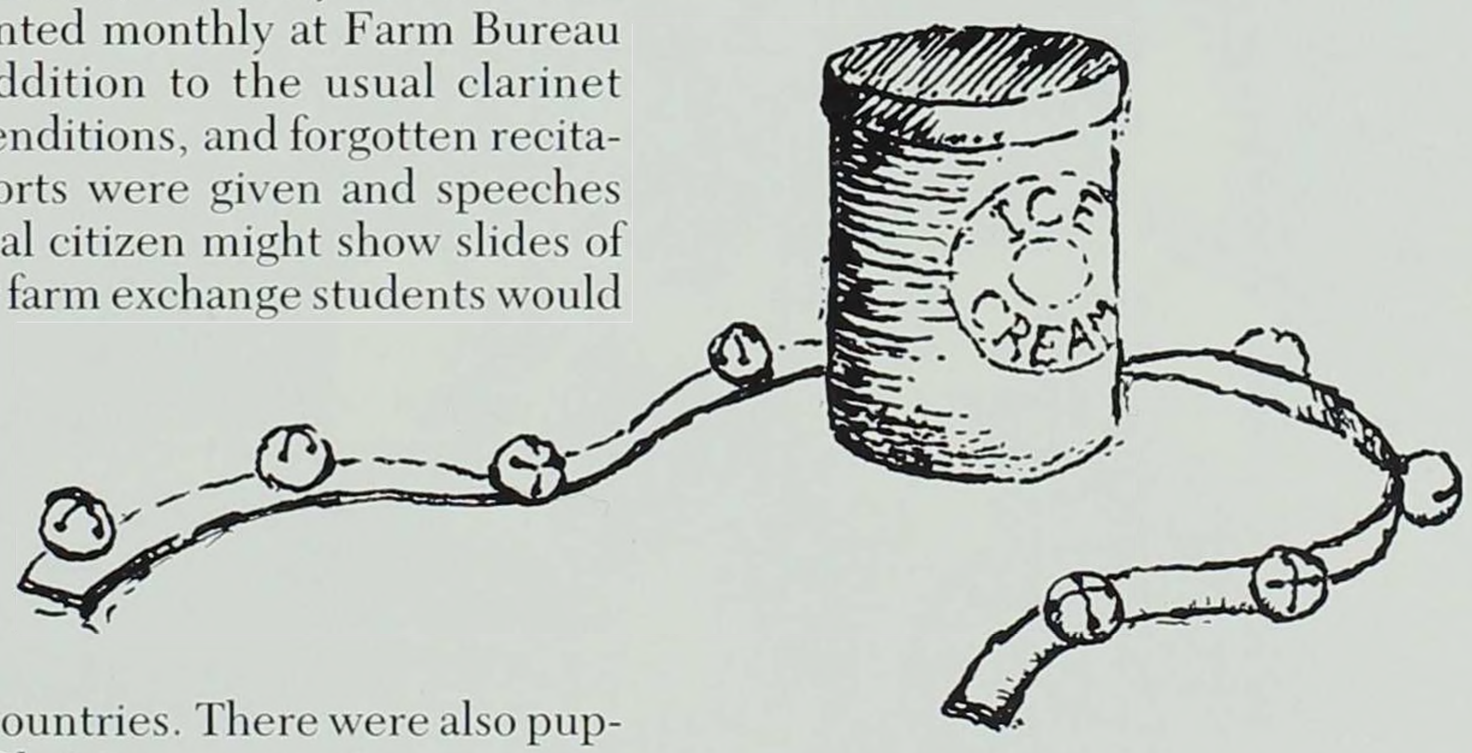
Very seldom did the curtain reach the bottom in one smooth trip. Amid the squeaks and rattles and the muffled gasps of the rope handler, it would come down a few inches, slip down on one end, retreat back towards the ceiling, roll a few feet more, and then plunge down the rest of the way. The upward ascent simply reversed the ordeal.

Under that curtain, a variety of entertainment was presented monthly at Farm Bureau meetings. In addition to the usual clarinet solos, soprano renditions, and forgotten recitations, book reports were given and speeches delivered. A local citizen might show slides of recent travels or farm exchange students would tell about their countries. There were also puppet shows and Christmas pageants.

Even before our stage debuts, Ruth and I had been entertaining captive audiences. When Mother and Daddy were entertaining guests at home, the adults would politely applaud a fifteen-minute performance which had kept all the offspring occupied during a two-hour rehearsal. (No one considered hiring baby-sitters but simply brought the children along.) Invariably these productions would begin with a vocal rendition of the "Three Old Maids of Lynn" or a piano version of "Canadian Capers." Then there would be the recitation of a poem or two, climaxed by the staging of a play.

Sometimes the script was supplied by stories from *Jack and Jill* magazine, but often they were original compositions. Once I learned all the speaking parts and songs of the operetta Ruth was in at school so we could give our own version. When one of the cast came down with measles two days before the school performance, I was rushed in to replace her after Ruth proudly informed the harried director that I knew the part. I was much younger than the other actors, but Ruth had coached me well.

When I was four years old and Ruth was eight, we entertained the audience with our rhythm band. Ruth and I played all of the instruments, accompanied by Mother at the piano. They ranged from beans rattling in a round ice cream carton, or coffee can lids with handles clapped together, to drums converted from inner tubes, and sleigh bells fastened to bands around our wrists. We would choose a




song like "Jingle Bells" and work each sound into its appointed place. When I see drummers in a band today, with four or five different contraptions to operate at once, I appreciate their skill.

MY FIRST DOLL was a cotton-stuffed cloth cutie with a painted cardboard face. I spotted her in the window of the five-and-ten-cent store. On each trip to town, I would head

Joanne and Ruth Wilson cradle part of their playtime population — two dolls and a cooperative kitten.

for the window and was broken-hearted one day to find her gone. Naturally Mother had been the purchaser and two weeks later we were reunited under the Christmas tree.

There were many more dolls over the years. Most of them were rubber and could survive daily bathings. I had one well-scrubbed doll, Elsie, who became completely colorless from washing. After her daily dunking, I would leave her to dry in the hammock of the roller towel in the washroom. Invariably, she would fall out on her head when Daddy unsuspectingly dried his hands for dinner.

We had no gorgeous bride dolls, and only one with hair. This one exception had been given to me by a kind lady who shared my hospital room when I had my appendix out. It was the only red-haired doll I had ever seen, and I thought she was beautiful, but she was to lead a lonely existence because she could not stand up to the wear and tear of everyday doll family life.

Besides our real dolls, we had hundreds of the paper variety. Some came from regular paper doll books but others we cut from the comic section of the Sunday paper where they were printed every week. Since these had limited wardrobes, we spent hours designing clothes out of wallpaper samples. Each character was carefully stored between two pages of an old copy of *Good Housekeeping*.

We also had a scrapbook which we made into apartments for these dolls. A blank page was divided into two parts — an upstairs and a downstairs. Furnishings were cut from pages of the mail-order catalog and pasted into place. We might furnish a den with golf clubs and fishing tackle for a bachelor or give a kitchen and a pink-ruffled boudoir to a domestic type. Once there was even a fairy who merited bushes and flowers from the seed catalog and a $19 birdbath set in the middle of her garden paradise.

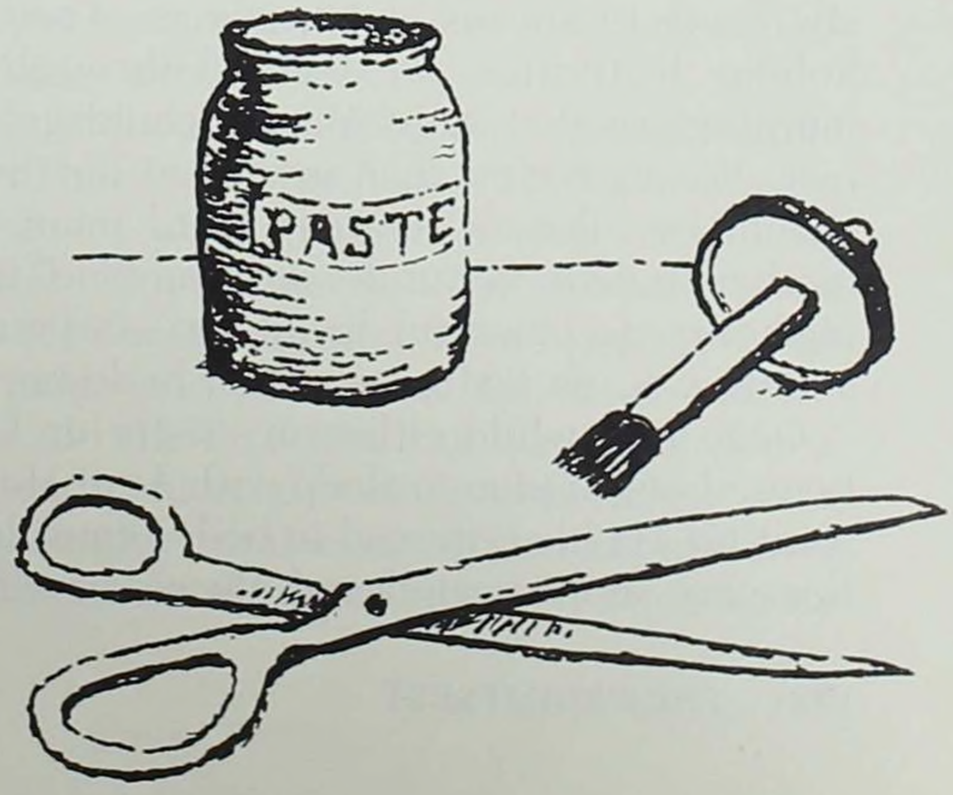
Dolls and playhouses go together, of course. Ruth and I had several different playhouses that I can recall. Our first was in the evergreen trees that bordered the road along the edge of the grove. Under the low-hanging branches forming cool, shady rooms with pine-needle carpets, a kitchen, living room, bedroom, and bath took shape in our imaginations. We salvaged discarded mirrors and lamps, and we made beds and tables out of wooden crates. Stumps became coffee tables and the lowest branches made pantry shelves. With the basic ingredients at hand, we made dozens of mud pies decorated with pine cones and pink nitrogen fertilizer scooped from the open fertilizer sacks in the barn. Mother never threw away a can or carton that would look realistic on our shelves. To this day she opens cans from the bottom from force of habit, as if she was still saving them for us.

When snow and cold weather forced us inside, we found an empty corner in the seed corn warehouse. Empty packing crates made good store counters for bakery goods and canned food displays. Mother and Grandma were occasional "customers" or we bought from each other. When we got tired of that, we could always play "hide and seek" among the piled bags of corn.

Then there was the beauty shop and drugstore in the orchard. Prescriptions were mixed and new hairdos created. One day a haircut was included for one of the neighbor girls and the shop was closed.

Probably our most elaborate playhouse was in an abandoned hog shed. Mother scrubbed it out with lye water and then gave us permission to move in. Built of wood, it had two rooms measuring about four by nine feet each, with doors to let in the light and a slanting roof which was too low for adults but high enough for pigs and children.

We threw ourselves into a frenzy of domesticity. Feed sacks became door curtains and orange crates formed cupboards. We hung



magazine pictures on the walls and fashioned a board sidewalk leading up to the playhouse. Daddy contributed grass seed, which we planted around the house, and flower seeds, which were planted in neat rows behind it.

Just as our garden patch was beginning to boast green sprouts, an extra litter of pigs demanded that the shed be moved back to the hog lot. I think Daddy was as sorry as we were when the curtains came down and the boxes were dragged out.

BECAUSE MY FATHER was an only child and my mother had only one sister, Ruth and I were left with only one aunt and no first cousins. I suppose this was regrettable in some ways, but we were always glad to be my aunt's only nieces.

When I was still quite small, I nicknamed her "Aunt Ha Ha" because she laughed at my baby antics. Indeed the name fit her warm smile and gracious personality.

To us, Aunt Ha Ha represented Culture and Sophistication with capital letters. First of all, she lived in Chicago, a city we connected with wickedness and excitement. Second, she was a math teacher and had even taught a couple of radio's "Quiz Kids." Third, she lived in an apartment and had a circle of interesting friends. All of these factors combined to make her an enchanting hostess or guest, whichever the case might be.

We saw her about twice a year, during winter and summer school vacations. She usually came to see us at Christmas. Amid the holiday festivities, we tiptoed through the mornings so that Aunt Ha Ha could get her rest. We marveled that anyone at our house should be allowed to sleep until noon. My mother could never understand anyone "wasting hours of a beautiful day in bed" and was up at 6:00 A.M. no matter what her bedtime.

Once in a while either my sister or I was granted permission to sleep with Aunt Ha Ha. Aunt Ha Ha liked to read in bed. I considered this very sophisticated and always brought a book along to do likewise. As the minutes went by and I became sleepy, I forced myself to lie absolutely still so that she wouldn't be distracted from her book and notice how late it was. When at last she did notice, she would exclaim, "My goodness! Your mother will scold if she finds out how late I've kept you up!" It was a delicious conspiracy we shared.

At 7:00 A.M., however, Mother would be standing by the bed whispering, "Time to get up. Don't wake Aunt Ha Ha." I would be back

**A visit from Aunt Ha Ha (Gladys Willcutt, center) calls for a three-generation photograph. In the wintertime, the children's maternal grandmother, Mabel Willcutt (left) lived with the Wilsons. Ida Willcutt Wilson stands to the right of young daughters Ruth and Joanne.**

in the world of early risers, not daring to reveal our night-owl activities, except to a jealous sister.

Aunt Ha Ha obligingly toured our latest projects, watched the play we had rehearsed for her benefit, and read aloud to us from our favorite books. Indeed she was the originator of most of our childhood library. Among her acquaintances, she knew several children's authors so that some of our books were personally autographed. We developed into avid readers, filling cards from the library and reading Mother's Literary Guild books before she had a chance to read them herself.

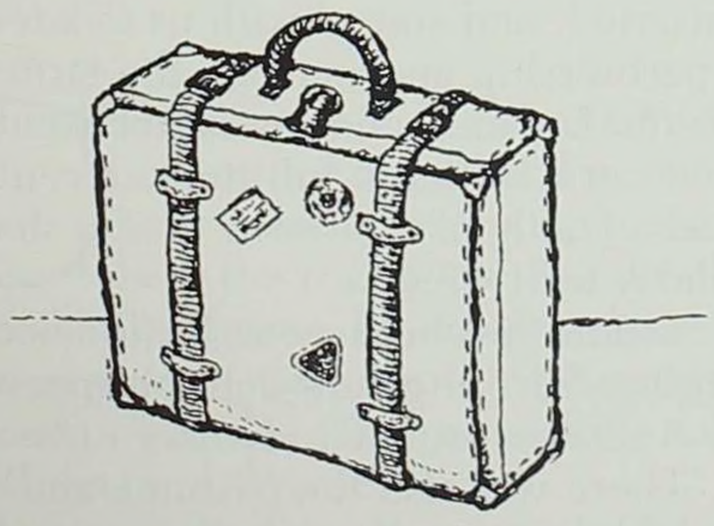
Our rare visits to Chicago were great occasions. We were caught up in a whirl of trips to the Museum of Science and Industry, rides on the Marshall Field's escalators, tours of sidewalk art shows and Chinatown mysteries, and swims in Lake Michigan. At her apartment, we were fascinated with the Murphy bed which disappeared into the wall.

I especially recall the night we went "night-clubbing." I'm sure no one called it "night-clubbing" then or Mother would never have consented, but we always remembered it as exactly that. My aunt was dating a very charming man-about-town at the time, and he suggested that we should see Chicago at night.

No one ever looked more tall, dark, and handsome to a ten-year-old than he did to me that night as he arrived to be our escort. Our first stop was a German beer garden. I have been in beer gardens since that were a travesty of the name in comparison to my childhood impression of this romantic place. It had a grass carpet to rival any golf green, gaily colored umbrellas, roaming musicians, and waitresses dressed in Old World costumes. I absorbed every detail so that it is as vivid to me today as it was then.

When we reluctantly left this exciting adventure, fully expecting to be driven home, we found ourselves next in a quaint place called "The Blue Danube." Here I was introduced to my first live orchestra, Bohemian costumes, and yogurt. Years later Greenwich Village was to make little impression on me in comparison. Somehow I felt I had already "lived."

I don't recall going to other places that night although to this day Ruth and I insist that there were many more. Mother denies this, and I'm sure she is right. Like sleeping late, visits to two such "doubtful" establishments would be quite a concession for Mother to make, even to her only sister. Mother, you'll remember, did not believe in "wasting time."



AS WITH MOST CHILDREN, the year was "calendared" not so much by months as by holidays. We looked forward to each one with much anticipation and preparation.

New Year's Eve was the one night of the year when we were allowed to stay up past midnight. Mother would pop corn, and we would sit around playing "Old Maid" and "Authors." About 10:00 P.M. Mother would serve ice cream, and we would turn on the radio to Times Square to listen to the celebration. By midnight the grape juice toast to the new year was almost anticlimactic.

Other holidays had their own special significance. There was May Basket Day. For weeks, Ruth and I would construct new baskets or remodel old ones. As we lined the baskets up on cookie sheets, Mother would pop corn and bake fudge and divinity to fill them and we would add the final touch of lilac sprig. Since our friends and neighbors were spread out over a considerable rural area, Mother chauffeured us in the car, making ten or twelve stops for us

to deliver twenty or thirty baskets. She would wait at the end of the lane while we would sneak up to the back door of each farmhouse and deposit the basket on the step, calling "May Basket!" to announce its presence. Then we would race back to the idling car before we were caught, running slower if we wanted to be kissed!

Oddly enough, Memorial Day was one of the biggest holidays of our year. This was because of the Memorial Day Parade in which we took part. The parade formed at the Courthouse Square in Sac City and wound through the business district, across the bridge, and down the road to the cemetery. There, at the monument to the war dead, the ceremonies were held.

I first participated in the mile hike to the cemetery at four years of age, joining Ruth as one of the flower girls. Our instructions were to drop half of our flowers over the bridge on the way to the cemetery in memory of the sailors, and lay the other half on the monument in tribute to the soldier heroes. Carried away by the crowds and stirring band music, I flung my entire bouquet over the bridge railing — only to have it land ingloriously on one of the bridge supports rather than float majestically around the bend in the river with the other floral tributes. My tears were lessened when Ruth hastily gave me part of her remaining bunch to lay on the soldier's grave.

When I was six years old, Ruth and I were asked to recite "In Flanders Fields" and "The Soldier's Reply." This was on the Memorial Day following Pearl Harbor. As I memorized the words, Mother carefully explained their meaning.

That day, we took our places at the head of the flower girls. We marched down the beautiful tree-lined archway which led to the monument. The twenty-one gun salute contrasted with the calm and serenity of the quiet graves and shaded roadways. When the last strains of "Taps" had died away and the answering echo had rung back from its station on a nearby hill, we recited the words, slowly and clearly as Mother had drilled us. I was old enough to understand the meaning of the words, and that year I walked the mile back with the rest of the procession.

Our observance of Halloween was a family affair. Living in the country, we couldn't walk door to door to trick or treat, although I did try it once. I was four years old and decided on my own to cut holes in a sheet for eyes, and tiptoe in the dark to peer into Grandma's kitchen window and tap on the pane. She was standing right in front of it, lost in thought over the dishpan, and she jumped so violently that *she* scared *me*. I jumped off the back steps and ran pell-mell, pulling the sheet awry so that it shut off my view through the holes and resulted in a headlong sprawl through our own kitchen door. It was hard to convince me that the ghost in the night had been me.

On Halloween night, each member of the family would choose a costume from the dress-up box in the attic. (This included my grandparents and Helen and Wayne, of course. Helen and Wayne were our "hired man" and "hired girl." In storybook fashion, they fell in love, married, and stayed with us to later buy into a partnership and manage the farm after my grandfather died and my father went into the seed corn business full-time. Eventually they had a family of their own to also share in our holiday festivities.)

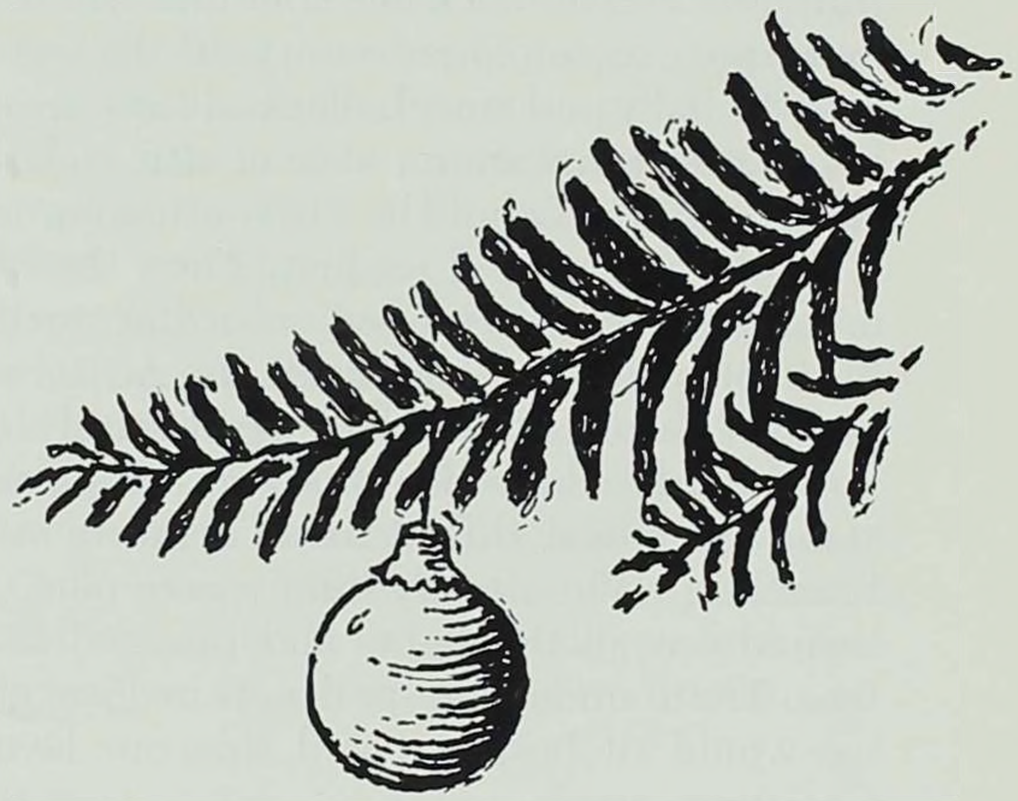
The costume box held a wonderful selection, accumulated from grade-school operettas, minstrel shows, and Christmas entertainments. There was also the costume and mask Daddy had worn as the girl singer in a mock wedding; the riding outfit Mother bought when she taught school in Idaho; the long,

bustled dresses Grandma wore in the Gay Nineties; and the kimonos Aunt Ha Ha brought us from Chinatown. Each year when we opened the lid, the trunk seemed as magical and mysterious as a pirate's treasure chest.

When everyone was appropriately dressed, we had a style show, complete with dramatizations. For example, Mother and Daddy might team up to act out Maggie and Jiggs, complete with rolling pin. It was always so much fun that we would go back to the attic to reappear in three or four different costumes before we ran out of ideas.

We did make one other attempt at "trick or treat." Dressed in black, with black stocking masks, we allowed Mother to paint our hands and arms with luminous paint, guaranteed on the label to wash right off. Mother took us in the car to the neighbor's house, where everyone was conveniently seated at the supper table. Mother turned off the headlights and engine and coasted into the driveway so that we could sneak up to the window screeching and waving our bodiless arms. To our delight, the victims registered the proper horror and they were only too glad to ward off any more scares by inviting us in for milk and cookies.

It turned out to be an expensive venture, however, as the luminous paint was not washable after all. We didn't mind, but Mother and a turpentine rag had other ideas. Instead of arms without bodies, we were soon convinced that we were about to have bodies without arms.



CHRISTMAS WAS ALWAYS A momentous occasion. For one thing, there were many people around to share the traditions. Besides the four in our family, there were my grandparents living next door, "Grossmutter" (Grandmother Willcutt), Aunt Ha Ha visiting from Chicago, and Helen and Wayne.

Christmas shopping began early. Ruth and I were given fifty cents each to buy gifts for those on our lists. It took us a long time in the "dime store" to find just the right powder puff for Mother, red bandana handkerchief for Daddy, and pocket comb for Grandpa, but we were not offered adult guidance unless we asked for it. Neither were we asked to divulge the secrets of our purchases. We wrapped the packages behind closed doors, and no one laughed if the wrapping didn't quite fit.

Aunt Ha Ha shut herself in her bedroom to wrap her presents. We missed her company, but the beautiful packages that emerged were worth the wait. Mother always reused paper kept from previous occasions and pressed ribbons to be used again too, but Aunt Ha Ha started fresh each year with gorgeous metallic wrappings pleated over neat white boxes bearing the names of Chicago stores and huge bows created especially for that one special package. She always called us to help her carry the gifts down to the tree, never scolding when we shook or squeezed them.

The Christmas tree created a great deal of bustle. Daddy was the undisputed purchaser because he was a good judge of the texture of the tree and could tell if it would last through New Year's Day without too much shedding. Ruth and I always argued for a taller tree than the one he bought, but his choice would look quite lofty by the time it was elevated in its pail of sand.

Decorating the tree took an entire evening. First Daddy would string on the lights while

Ruth and I stood back and told him where the bare spots were. Then we would dig out the colored balls and tinsel. They always seemed brand new to us after a year of attic isolation. Each year there would be a new ornament, and it would be fastened on first. Then the other ornaments were arranged according to their best color schemes and locations. At last each piece of tinsel had to be laid on separately. (We never tolerated the slip-shod way some people stand back and throw tinsel strands at the branches.) When everything was in place, we turned out all the lights and plugged in the tree. Then, under the spell of its magical glow, we would sit beside it and sing our favorite Christmas carols.

As Christmas Eve drew near, the packages piled up under the tree and spilled out behind neighboring chairs. There were packages from everyone, to everyone. One year we tried drawing names, but Daddy bought presents for everyone anyway, labeled with crazy things like "Merry Christmas Eve" and "Happy December 25th." We all felt so guilty to be getting his presents without giving any back that the next year we went back to our old habits.

Christmas Eve would begin with the church service. Most of the family usually had a part in the Christmas program. Daddy led the songs, Mother supervised her Sunday School class, and Ruth and I took part in various pageants, choirs, and tableaux.

The services weren't over until 9:00 P.M. or so, but we were just beginning. When we returned home, Mother would gather chairs in the living room and Daddy would take up his position as official Santa Claus. Ruth and I would hunt up the small bells we wore around our necks to designate us as Santa's helpers.

One at a time, Daddy would pick up the packages and read off the names. Taking turns, Ruth and I would deliver the package to its owner who would have the attention of everyone else. After the "Ohs" and "Ahs," the gift would be passed around the circle for all to have a closer look. Then another name was called off. This process took a long time, but we would never have dreamed of opening more than one package at once. Watching others open the surprise so carefully chosen was just as much fun as receiving one. At last when the tree was bare of presents, everyone would arrange the gifts in piles for viewing and then mill around and exclaim over them.

Then Mother would announce that it was time for us to hang our stockings. This was accomplished at the newel post on the second floor landing of the stairway since we didn't have a fireplace. Having only small ankle and knee socks of our own, we had long since talked Mother out of some old silk hose, which floated enticingly from the tacks that secured them.

I would vow to stay awake to listen for Santa's reindeer but the excitement usually had been too much. One time I did hear a noise in the hall and tiptoed to the door. It was only Mother pausing by our stockings with a large basket. I assumed she was bringing up her gifts to put away and was surprised to see how much I startled her. She shooed me off to bed and took the basket back downstairs with her. That was very unusual since Mother never made an unnecessary trip upstairs or forgot to put away the things she had brought up.

The first one awake in the morning would call the others, pull her stocking off the post — tack and all — and race down to the living room to investigate its contents. The transparency of the stocking would make us all the more excited because we could see all the riches at once, but we never pulled out more than one object at a time.

There would be one larger gift peeking out at the top. It might be a new doll, a music box, or a mouth organ. At the very bottom of the stocking, in the toe, was an inevitable corncob to remind us that there was always room to become better girls.

One year during World War II, our stockings hung surprisingly limp. A note inside explained that since materials were scarce and his workers were off helping to fight the war, Santa was donating all of his toys to the war orphans that year. We were disappointed at first, but Daddy showed us the thank-you letter from the Red Cross, and we knew the good feeling that the true spirit of Christmas brings — perhaps more vividly than at any other Christmas I can remember.

On Christmas Day we usually attended a family reunion. Mother would get up at 4:00 A.M.

to put the turkey in the oven. By 7:00, we would be awakened to its delicious smell wafting up the stairs. By this time, Mother would be fixing the salad, rolls, or whatever else she was taking to the family dinner.

We were always the first to arrive at the designated relative's house. The others would come trailing in for a couple of hours, so that by the time everyone was ready to eat, we were starved.

Meanwhile, the men had been smoking and visiting, and the women had been working in the kitchen, nibbling a bit behind our backs as bowl covers were removed, salads unmolded, and rolls reheated. We kids had just been standing around, torturing ourselves with the sight of the table. Since we hadn't seen most of these distant cousins for a year, the ice wasn't broken until after we had eaten. After the turkey and dressing, mashed potatoes, cranberry ice, and hot rolls had been topped off with chocolate cake and homemade ice cream, we went off to the attic or the barn to play "hide and seek" or "Monopoly."

It was late when we headed home and we were tired out from playing hard, so Ruth would go to sleep on the back seat of the car and I would curl up on the wide rear shelf. I preferred the shelf because of the night expanse of stars and snowy fields that the view provided. Climbing into bed, we were sleepy and content, another season of familiar traditions completed. □

**[Part 2 will appear in the Spring 1988 Palimpsest.]**

# Making her Mark

## Nellie Verne Walker, Sculptor

by Louise Noun

ON JANUARY 1, 1900, Nellie Verne Walker, age twenty-five, arrived in Chicago from Moulton, Iowa, her sights set on becoming a sculptor. Only four feet ten inches tall and weighing ninety-three pounds, Walker's ambition was in no way diminished by her small size. Walker planned to study with Lorado Taft, the well-known American sculptor who taught at the Art Institute of Chicago. Taft later recalled that "one day there walked into my studio a little girl, who had come to Chicago to learn sculpture and make her mark in the world of art. It was all arranged in her own mind; she had decided it. It made no difference how steep or how hard the way, she was going to succeed." Walker soon became one of Taft's favorite pupils.

This determined young woman, born in Red Oak in southwestern Iowa on December 8, 1874, was the daughter of Jane Lindsey Walker and Everett A. Walker, a tombstone maker and real estate dealer. When Nellie was a year old the Walkers moved to Moulton in the south-central part of the state. Nellie as the oldest of six children—four girls and two boys—was expected to help with household chores. She hated these tasks but was fascinated by her father's work as a stonecutter, so in order to avoid washing dishes, she escaped to his workshop whenever she could. Because of this interest Nellie was her father's favorite child. Furthermore he was impressed by the miniature animals and people Nellie molded out of Iowa clay when playing house with her younger sister. As other children in the Walker family became old enough to assume household responsibilities Nellie was allowed to spend more time working with her father, where she learned to smooth and polish stone and to cut epitaphs and decorative borders. After graduating from high school in Moulton when she was sixteen Nellie taught one term at a nearby country school.

During the summer of 1892 Nellie asked her father for a block of Bedford stone intended for a monument base so that she could try her hand at carving a head of Abraham Lincoln. When her father hesitated, Nellie appealed to her mother, who supported her request, and her father eventually capitulated. Nellie knew nothing about the technique of sculpture, but with an engraving of Lincoln in Barrett's *Life of the Martyr President* for a model, and with the use of her father's tools, she managed in three weeks to create a credible likeness which followed the engraving down to the tilt of the head and the details of the clothing. Not knowing how to carve hair, she solved the problem by making long, thin rolls, which she later described in a 1948 interview as "something like little worms." "But that is how some modernistic sculptors make hair today," she commented.

The Lincoln head was shown in the Iowa Building of the 1893 World's Columbian

COURTESY UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN



Exposition in Chicago as the work of a seventeen-year-old girl with no formal training. Nellie's father took her to Chicago twice to attend the fair, once during Christmas vacation and again for a six-week visit in the spring. The fairgrounds, her father recalled, were like "actual fairy land" to Nellie. As an aspiring sculptor she must have been particularly impressed with the numerous elaborate statues and ornate fountains. During her spring sojourn in Chicago, Nellie attended classes at the Art Institute. She wanted to stay on, but her father could not afford to pay for more schooling.

Walker wouldn't give up her dream of becoming a sculptor. Determined to earn enough to pay for her own art education, she learned typing and shorthand and got a job as secretary for an Ottumwa lawyer. Finally, after six long years of working and saving, she was able to set out for Chicago on New Year's Day, 1900, with the help of a $200 loan from her employer. During her first years in the city she had to scrimp and save to keep herself afloat. She found a job in the Art Institute library which paid enough to cover her tuition, but she had no resources other than the meager funds which she had brought from home. Her first break came after Evelyn Longman, Lorado Taft's teaching assistant, left for New York in 1901 and Walker was named to replace her. This job paid a small salary. Taft soon came to rely on Walker in other ways, too. He found her secretarial skills useful in helping with his correspondence and, at his request, she took over his lectures to Chicago schoolchildren.

Taft at this time was a popular teacher with a circle of admiring students. He had studied in Paris at the École des Beaux-Arts in the early 1880s and was appointed as the instructor in sculpture at the Art Institute in 1886, a position which he held for the next forty-three years. He is well known for his *History of American Sculpture*, published in 1903, as well as for his monumental, often symbolic, sculptures in the Beaux-Arts manner. This style, which had reached a high point at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, was epitomized by

**Midway artists gather for a festive dinner in Lorado Taft's studio. Walker holds her black cat, Satan (far right). Taft is behind her.**

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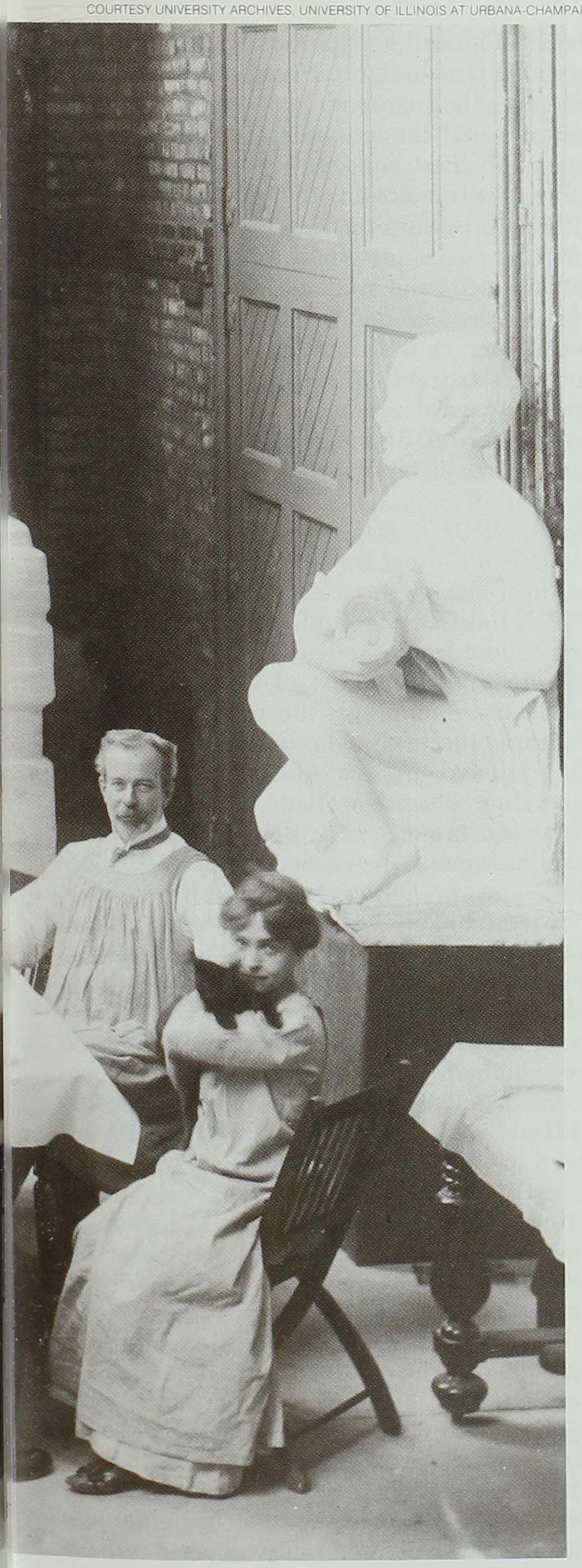

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**Chief Keokuk**
**1913**
**Rand Park, Keokuk, Iowa**

Daniel Chester French's sixty-four-foot-high symbolic female figure, *Republic*, which towered over the surrounding neoclassical palaces that adorned the grounds. Sculpture of this type embodied concepts of lofty virtue and noble idealism along with familiar symbolism. Although Taft was a leading sculptor of his time, his work is less highly regarded today. As Taft's protégé and student, Walker would also work in the Beaux-Arts tradition. But by the end of her career, modernism (in the new forms of abstractionism, expressionism, and realism) would replace academic styles and Walker would find herself out of step with current trends in art.

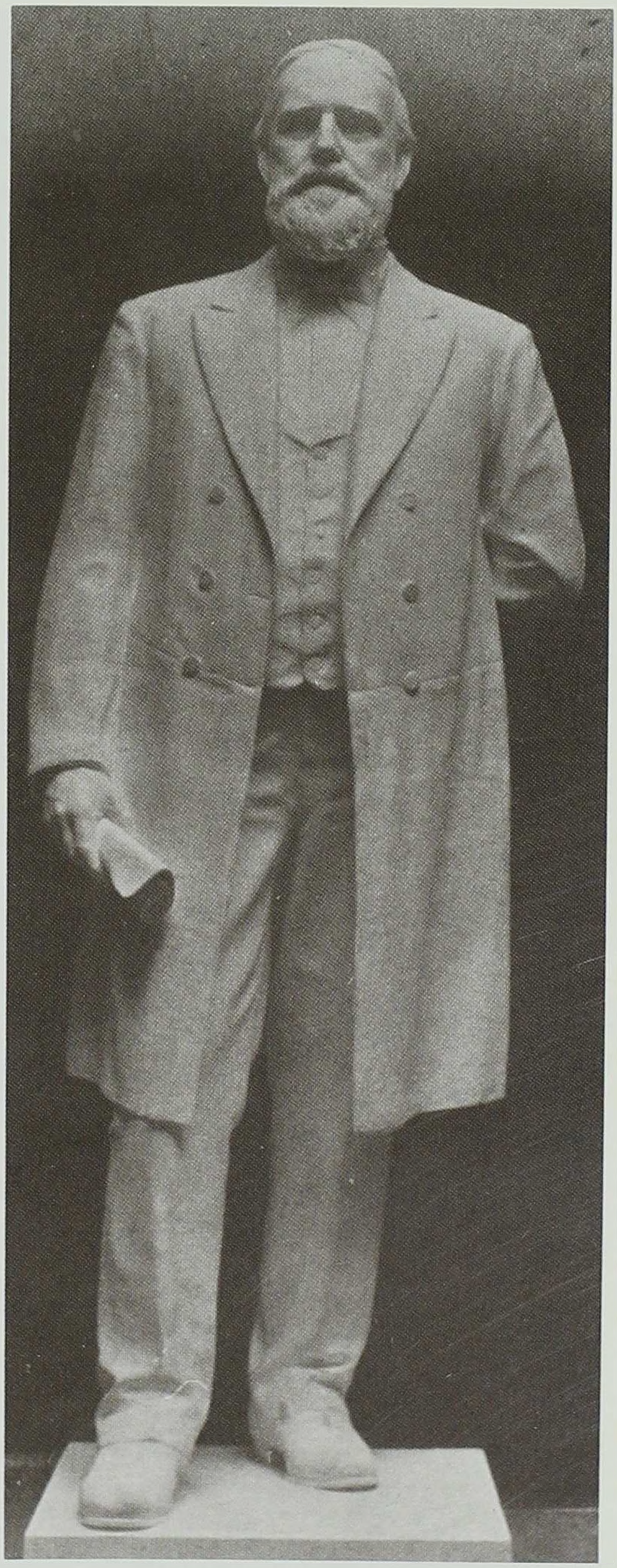
IN LATE 1903 and early 1904, Walker worked in the state capitol in Des Moines on a portrait bust of Governor Albert Baird Cummins. She used a temporary studio in the attic over the senate chamber where the governor would pose for her in his spare time. She was working here on January 4 when fire broke out in the house chamber. Smelling smoke she rushed downstairs where she begged firefighters to save her work. Since they were too busy to bother with her request she felt her way back up the smoke-filled stairs and covered the bust with a heavy cloth. In telling the story of her heroism a Des Moines paper commented, "She is a petite little lady, thoroughly devoted to her art, wholly unconscious of self and her whole person animated with ambition." Both Walker and the bust survived the fire unscathed. The bust was subsequently completed but apparently never purchased. When she broke up her studio in the 1940s Walker gave the Cummins bust to the Iowa State Department of History and Archives.

In 1905 Walker received her first important commission. This was for a grave monument in memory of Winfield Scott Stratton, a Colorado Springs mining tycoon who had died three years earlier. Walker had been visiting her cousin in Colorado Springs at the time of Stratton's death, and she became acquainted with the Stratton family when she was asked to make

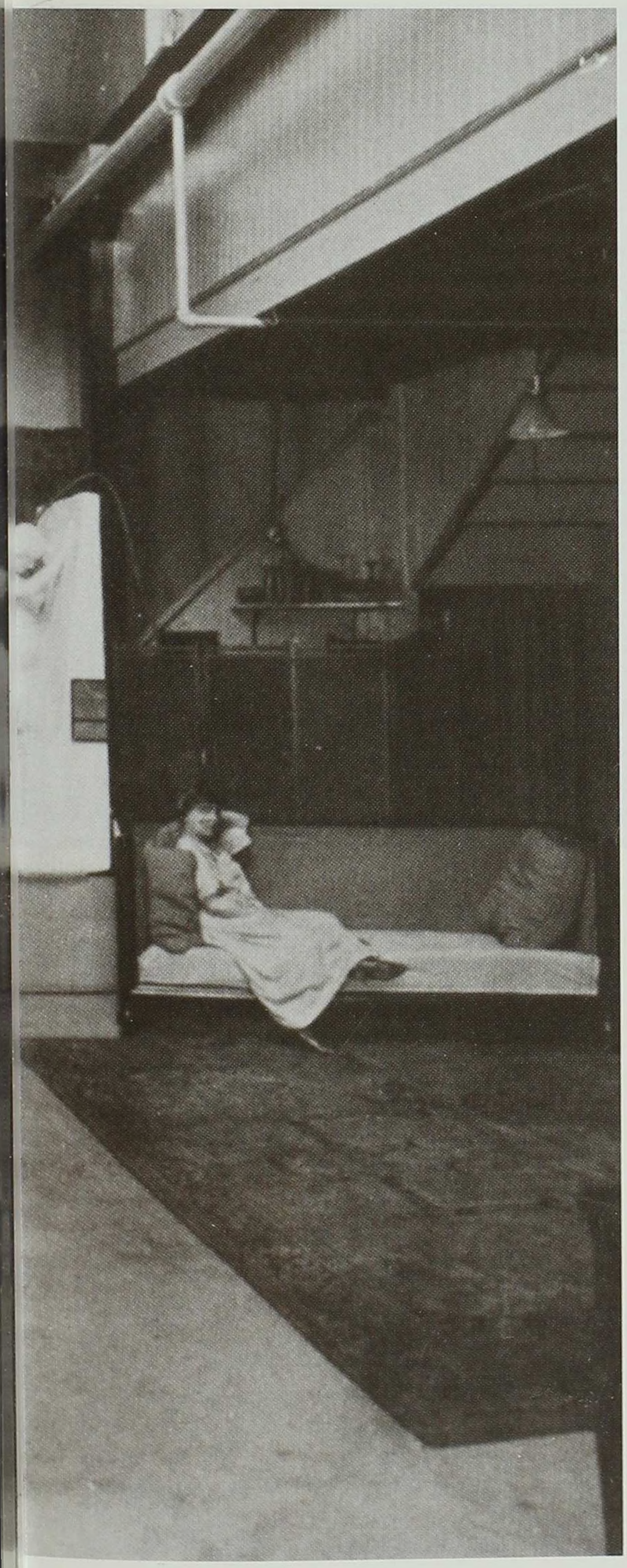
a death mask of this eminent citizen. The Stratton monument consists of two veiled figures symbolic of charity which are partially detached from a mass of granite. This commission gave Walker immediate professional status. It also demanded her full time, so she quit teaching and accepted Taft's offer of space in his studio in the Fine Arts Building on Michigan Avenue, which afforded ample facilities for the execution of large-scale sculpture. The Stratton memorial was the first of a number of grave monuments which Walker executed during the course of her career. These include monuments in Cadillac, Michigan, and Marinette, Wisconsin, as well as in Minneapolis, Battle Creek, Omaha, Baltimore, and Chicago. One wonders if Walker ever thought of herself as following in her father's footsteps — except in a more elegant manner.

In 1907 Walker was commissioned by the state of Iowa to make a bronze portrait figure of former senator James Harlan for the Capitol in Washington, D.C. In 1913 she completed what is probably her best-known work in Iowa — a statue of Chief Keokuk. Commissioned by the Keokuk chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, the statue stands in Rand Park in Keokuk overlooking the Mississippi River. A portrait bust in plaster of Dr. William F. King, former president of Cornell College, which is on display in College Hall at Cornell, was made in 1920. In 1923 Walker carved two panels in low relief set into the exterior walls of the library at Iowa State University in Ames. These panels are embedded so high that they are difficult to view. The panel at the north end of the building represents figures then symbolic of the activities of women students (art, home economics, literature); the other panel, at the south end of the building, represents figures symbolic of the activities of men students (engineering, science, veterinary medicine, agriculture). Both male and female students are draped in the classical manner.

Walker's other sculptures outside Iowa include numerous portrait busts; a war memorial to the soldiers of 1812 in the Historical Building in Springfield, Illinois; panels on the Woman's Building at the University of Michigan; and a group titled *Her Son*. Consisting of a mother and young boy, *Her Son* was once dis-



Senator James Harlan
1907
Hall of Fame, Washington, D.C.



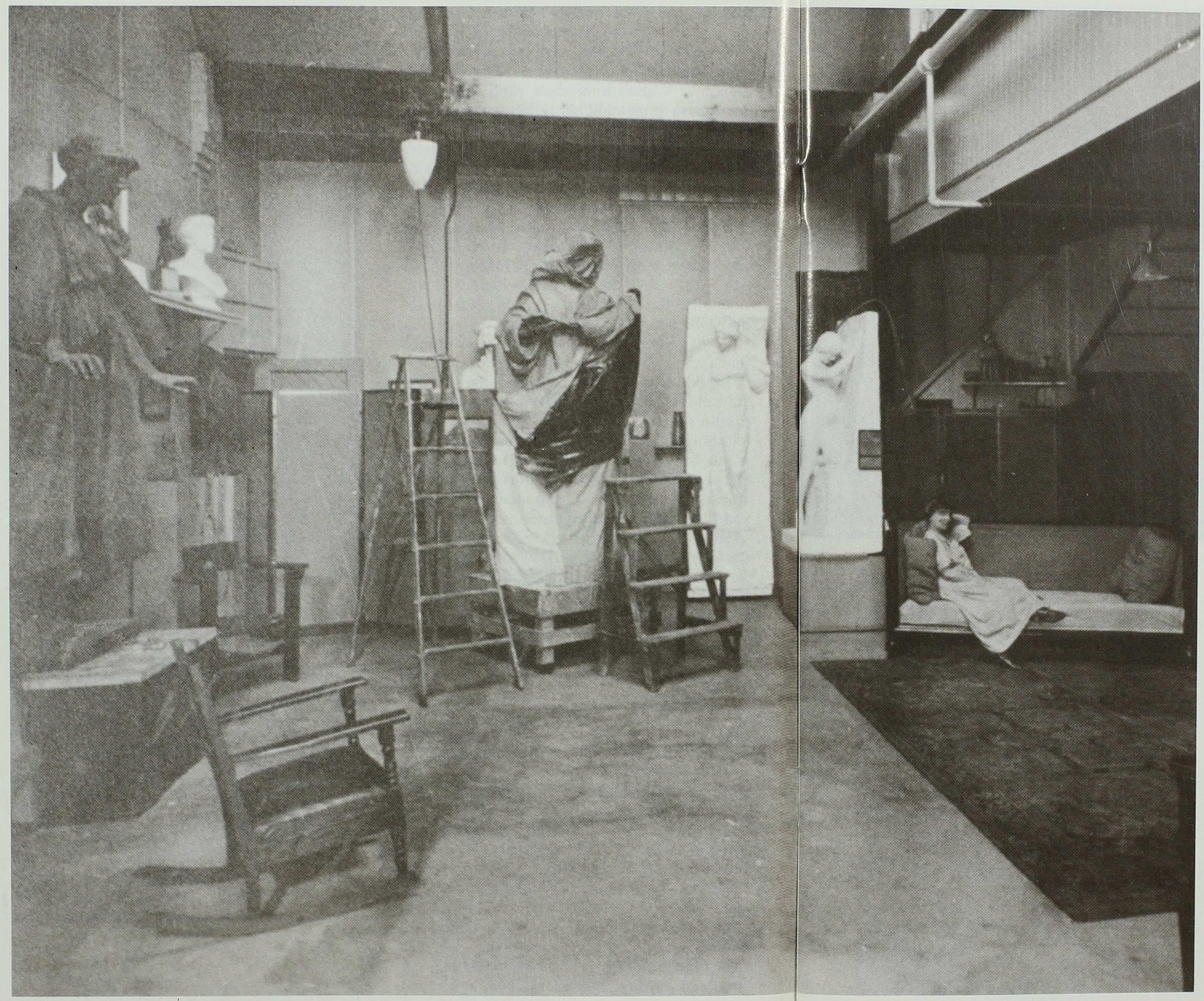
played at the Art Institute of Chicago, where it met with great popular approval.

DURING HER CHICAGO YEARS, Walker was closely associated with the artistic and literary circles in the city. She was part of a group of painters, sculptors, and writers who owned "Eagle's Nest," a camp on the cliffs of the Rock River near Oregon, Illinois. There were six or seven cabins and a main lodge where members took refuge from the city heat in summer. In 1908 Walker was elected to membership in the "Little Room," an exclusive Chicago literary and social club. She was one of the organizers of the Cordon Club, whose membership consisted of professional women artists, writers, and musicians, and she served two terms as president of this organization. Walker also was a founding member of the Chicago chapter of the Business and Professional Women's Association and held membership in the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Daughters of 1812.

Walker won national recognition in 1911 with her election to the National Sculpture Society. The only other Chicago member at that time was Walker's mentor, Lorado Taft. That same year she left her studio in the Fine Arts Building in downtown Chicago and joined Taft and other artists who had moved the previous year to new studio space. Taft had erected studios on land belonging to the University of Chicago on its south campus at Ellis Avenue and 60th Street. Taft was given use of the land rent-free with the provision that after a certain time had elapsed, the studios which he erected there would become the property of the university.

These studios, all under one roof, came to be known as the Midway Studios because they were located on land which had once been the Midway of the 1893 Columbian Exposition. Each artist had her or his own studio in which to live and work. Taft and his wife had their living quarters in an adjoining old mansion. Joint housekeeping arrangements included employment of a cook who prepared the mid-

**Dwarfed by her sculptures, Walker reclines on a couch (far right) in her Midway studio in Chicago.**





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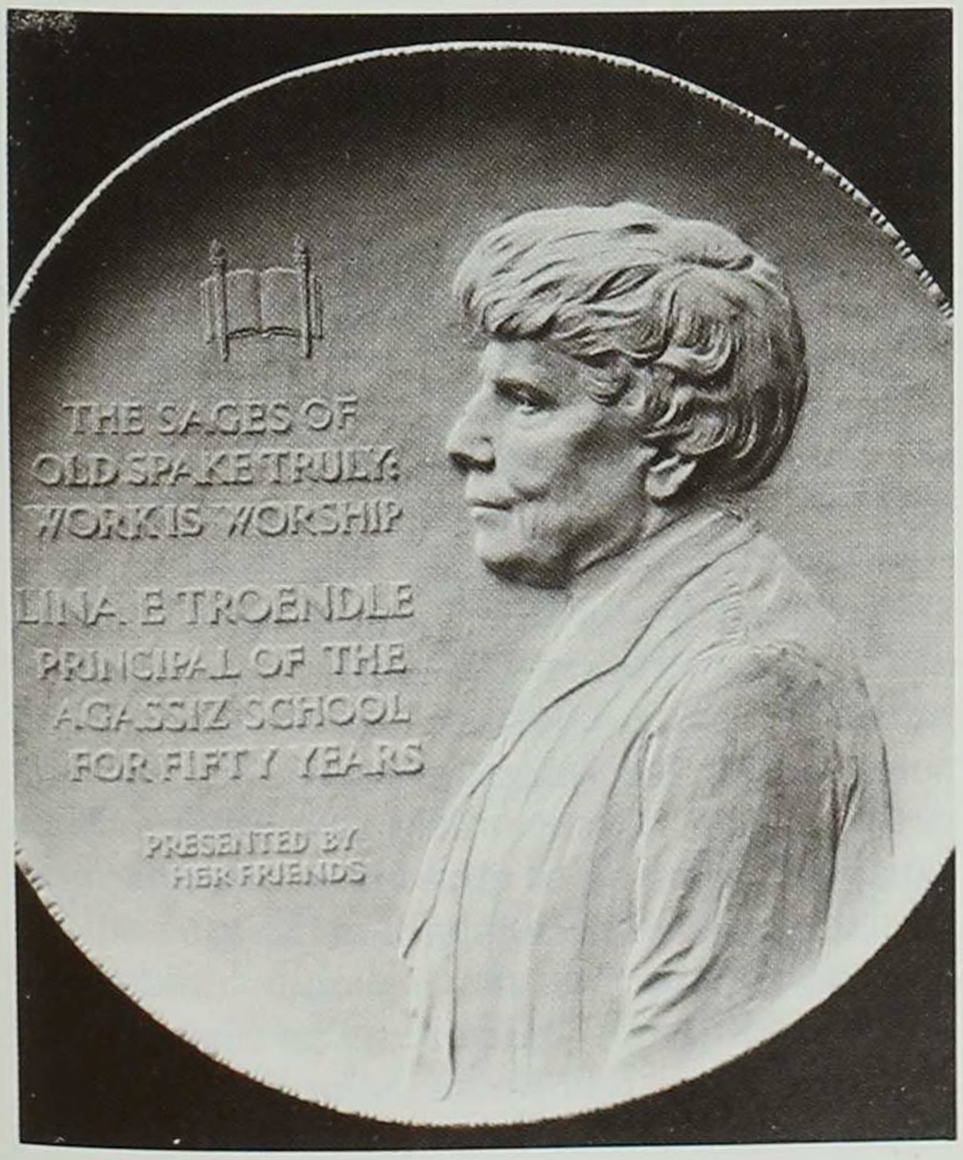
**Dwarfed by her sculptures, Walker reclines on a couch (far right) in her Midway studio in Chicago.**

day meal, which was served in a long, central court dominated by a plaster cast of Taft's *Fountain of the Great Lakes* and lined with other sculptures on either side. At times there were as many as thirty or forty people at lunch, presided over by Taft at the head of the table. Walker, the most permanent resident, traditionally sat at the other end.

Individual studios opened off the central court. Walker's had a high skylight, a large fireplace, a small kitchen, and a balcony with two bedrooms. A studio in the rear of the complex had a stage for dramatic entertainments and was stocked with costumes. Midway Studios became one of the showplaces of Chicago, and Walker's home and workplace until 1948. "This is an ideal way to live," she told her niece, Genevieve Lewis Szaton, "No husband to please, no children to disturb one, good friends to converse with, who will give help when needed, yet all the privacy one could wish for."

WALKER MADE TWO (possibly three) trips to Europe, the first in 1910, and the second in 1914. During her first trip she traveled as far as Constantinople. Her second trip, begun in January 1914, was financed in part by gifts of friends anxious to enable her to make an extended stay. One purpose of this trip was to meet the seventy-three-year-old sculptor Auguste Rodin, whom Walker greatly admired. She rented a studio in Paris, intending to stay two years, but her visit was cut short in August by the outbreak of World War I. She was forced to flee, leaving all her possessions behind.

From 1917 to 1921, during the administration of Governor Frank Lowden, Walker served on the Illinois State Board of Art Advisors and in that role advised on public monuments, especially war memorials, which were popular following World War I. At the same time she was anxious to help people in

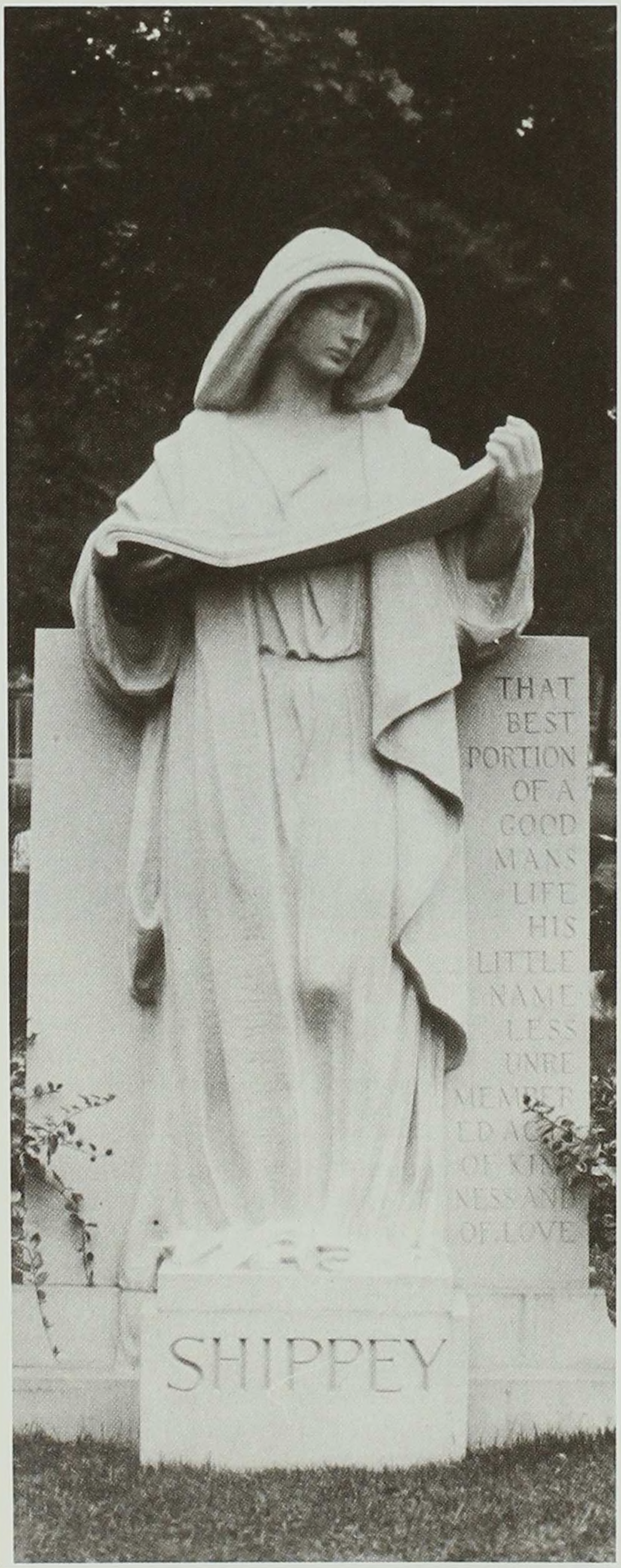



Iowa Suffrage Memorial
1934, State Capitol, Des Moines

Portrait medallion of Lina E. Troendle
1929, Chicago

Iowa who were interested in establishing a similar board. In early 1919 she wrote Edgar Harlan, curator of the Historical Department of Iowa, offering to come to Des Moines to show a set of seventy-five slides of war memorials which she had collected. There is no record of her offer being accepted. Although there was some interest in Iowa in establishing such a board, the legislature did not take any action in support of this concept.

FROM TIME TO TIME Taft hired Walker to work on his commissions. She helped with the design and modeled the two large figures which flank the entryway to the courthouse in Jackson,




Monument at grave
of Charles W. Shippey
1922
Rosehill Cemetery, Chicago

Mississippi. She was also part of a team which made sculptures for the Balaban and Katz movie theater in downtown Chicago. In July 1926, Walker wrote to her friend, the writer Henry B. Fuller, concerning work on this project: "Our sculpture factory has been running full-time and full-force, with occasional visits from . . . the architects. We are now on the home stretch, with eight more figures to make in about six weeks. . . . It's been rather fun, although I do not know that I have ever been so tired evenings as I have been since this work began."

With the prospect of several large commissions in 1926 she saw the possibility of earning enough to realize her dream of owning a small place on the south shore of Lake Michigan near Chicago. "If these good things come my way," she wrote her friend Fuller, "I'll build my shack on the back of the lot, fronting the water, and sell the front half for a million dollars . . . and live happily ever after." Unfortunately, this dream was never realized.

But Walker's goals went beyond her own personal happiness. Reminiscences written in 1969 by Walker's niece, Genevieve Lewis Szaton, recall Walker's warm and caring relationships with her family. She arranged and helped pay for medical treatment for a crippled niece and offered food and lodging to her nine nieces and nephews until they could get jobs in Chicago. Szaton spent several summers with Walker, assisting with her work and delighting in the friendly atmosphere of the Midway Studios. Szaton eventually married a young artist whom she met there.

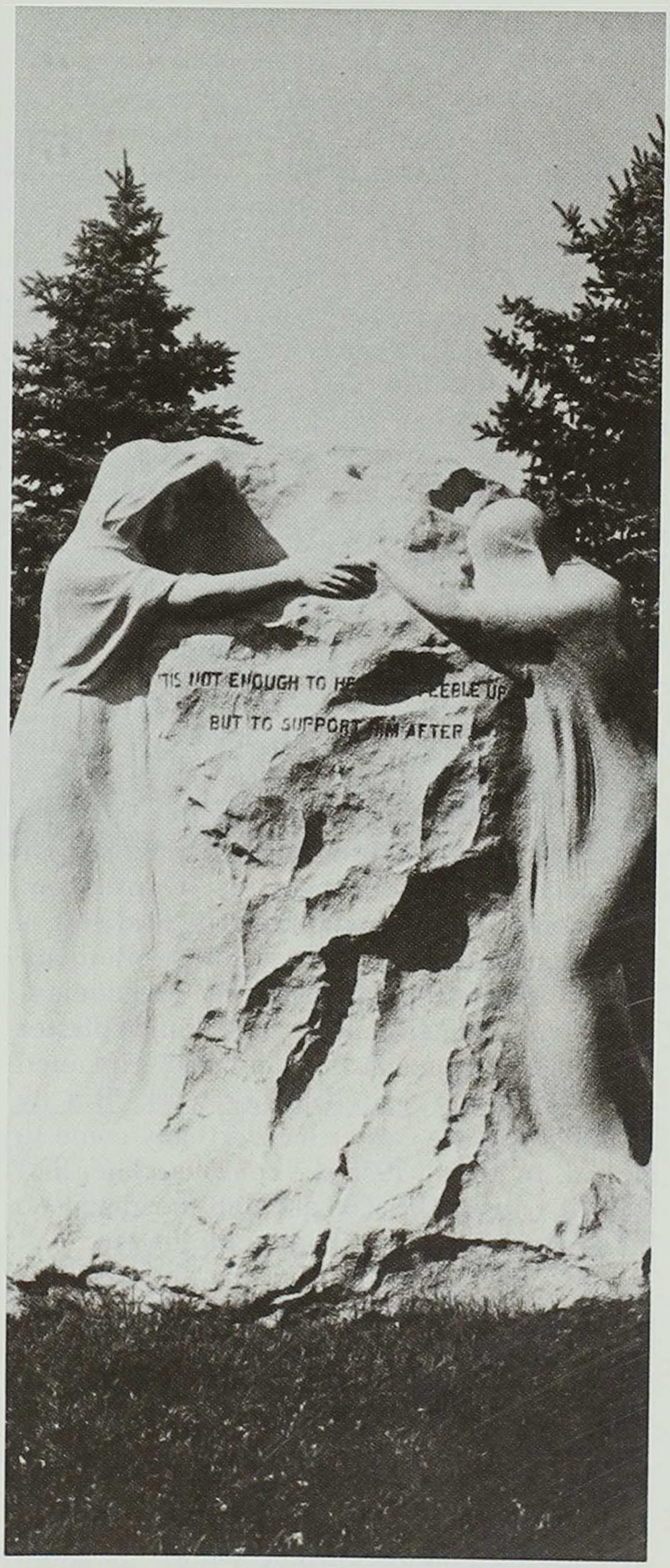
Walker did not limit her houseguests to just her family. She loved cats and always had one or more in her studio. But not all Midway residents approved of her animal friends. When her friend Fuller, whom she affectionately called "Henry B," offered her another kitten in 1928, Walker regretted that she couldn't give it a home. "I wouldn't dare," she replied. "Mr. Taft would have a fit if another cat appeared on the scene. I meet the days now with fear and trembling for fear the cats will get me into trouble . . . another one would finish us all." Although Walker never married she had a close friend in Fuller, who often dropped by for a visit. Fuller's death in July 1929 left a

permanent void in her life.

Walker suffered an even more severe loss with the death of Taft in 1936. She found Midway Studios desolate without him. Walker was one of five of Taft's associates named to finish commissions on which he had been working. One of these is the Haym Salomon monument on Wacker Drive in Chicago. Walker sculpted the figure of Salomon.

THE DEPRESSION OF THE 1930s brought financial difficulties for Walker. Her career over the years had seen its ups and downs. It had hit a low point in the mid-1920s when work was scarce, but by 1927 she had reported to Edgar Harlan that "after several lean years" she now had plenty to do. But by the early 1930s the lean years returned as her sculpture commissions declined. She refused to have anything to do with the Works Progress Administration, Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal agency which ran programs for unemployed artists. "I would starve before I would go to that bunch for help," she wrote a friend. The project in Chicago was in the hands of "an ultra modern advocate," she said, who would love nothing better than to be able to turn down older artists. Walker, who viewed Roosevelt with great alarm, commented after his election to a second term in 1936, "I wonder if we shall ever again have a general election. I think the American people *can be bought* which is perhaps the worst aspect of the whole thing."

In 1934 Walker did complete a low-relief memorial in bronze honoring the women who worked for woman suffrage in Iowa. This panel, commissioned by the Iowa Woman Suffrage Commission headed by Mary Hunter of Des Moines, is located in the rotunda of the state capitol near the entrance to the House of Representatives. Walker envisioned this work as showing "all those splendid women in their onward march toward victory . . . those early women who first took up the fight for suffrage, the passing of their torch to the hands of the oncoming band of workers, each bringing to the cause her special gift, the artist, the teacher, the doctor, the musician, the mother, etc. and at the end, the figure of a young girl,




Monument at grave
of Winfield Scott Stratton
1905
Evergreen Cemetery
Colorado Springs

bringing her youth, with its suggestion of others following on." The figures on this panel are clothed in long, flowing robes reminiscent of ancient Greek art; they are identified by the symbols they carry. Below this panel is a bronze plaque listing prominent workers in the suffrage cause.

Walker's best work is probably the Lincoln monument near Vincennes, Indiana, which was commissioned by the Illinois chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and completed in 1937. It is located near the spot where the Lincoln family is thought to have crossed the Wabash River into Illinois. This monument consists of a relief panel of Indiana limestone, ten feet high and twenty-six feet long, showing the Lincoln family walking beside an oxcart loaded with their possessions. A guiding angel hovers overhead, pointing the way to Springfield. In front of this panel is a free-standing bronze figure of the young Lincoln helping to drive the oxen.

Another important source of Walker's income was lost with the decline in demand for paid lecturers during the Great Depression. For many years she had toured the Midwest as a lecturer under the auspices of the Redpath Bureau. In these "Clay Talks" she had demonstrated modeling a clay head, making a plaster cast, and cutting marble, and had explained other processes related to her work. But by 1932 her lecture career had virtually come to an end. In March 1935 she completed her first lecture trip in three years but she made no money because prices had had to be cut.

WALKER'S CHICAGO CAREER ended in 1948 when the University of Chicago took over the Midway Studios property. Short of funds and with impaired eyesight, Walker, at the age of seventy-three, reluctantly decided to move to Colorado Springs, where her youngest sister lived. "I should have gone back," Walker said in a 1970 interview, "only I couldn't reconstruct life in Chicago with changing times and new concepts in art." Walker made a few sculptures during her Colorado Springs years, among them a relief panel of dancing children for a child-care center. She

also worked for a short time in the Van Briggle Pottery. But her lack of a studio, her age, and her failing eyesight severely limited what she could do.

Walker's last years in Colorado Springs were spent in the Myron Stratton Home for "needy oldsters." Ironically, the home had been founded through a bequest of the man whose family had given Walker her first professional commission back in 1905. During these years she filled albums with photographs of her sculptures and press clippings about her work as mementos for members of her family. She wrote her own obituary and let it be known that she wanted no funeral when she died. To complete arrangements for her death, she traded one of her sculptures, a figure of St. Francis made during her Chicago years, to a Colorado Springs funeral director in exchange for her cremation. She also asked her brother to destroy the Lincoln head which she had carved as a young girl. She felt it was too amateurish to be preserved. Her brother, however, kept the head in his home, and after her death he placed it in the John Garrett Memorial Library in Moulton, where it is proudly displayed along

**Lincoln Monument**
**1937**
**Near Vincennes, Indiana**

with the engraving of Lincoln which served as Walker's model.

Walker remained alert and spry, despite near blindness, until well into her nineties. She died at the Stratton Home on July 10, 1973, at the age of ninety-eight. Funeral services for her were held in Colorado Springs and graveside services at the cemetery at Moulton where her ashes are interred. The need of her family and friends to mourn her death in a conventional manner triumphed over Walker's wishes for no funeral rites.

Walker was one of a surprisingly large number of women who became professional sculptors in the early nineteen hundreds. (The 1910 *American Art Annual* lists over one hundred such women.) They came from all walks of life — from Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, daughter of New York millionaire Cornelius Vanderbilt, to Walker, daughter of a Moulton, Iowa, tombstone maker. Walker was one of the few Iowa artists of her time to win recognition outside her native state. Her achievements, despite great handicaps, should stand as an inspiration for other women who aspire to a career in art. □

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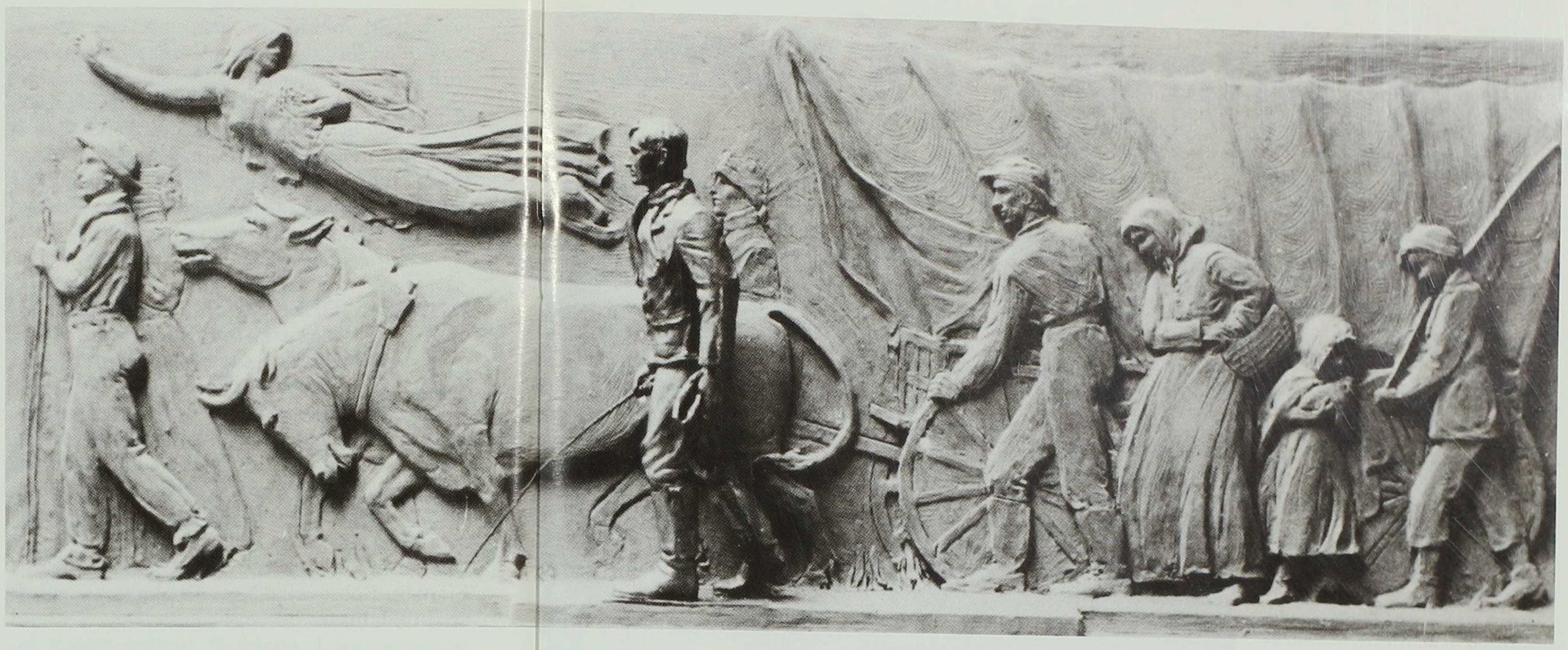

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# Core Sample of Iowa

## The Mather-Bush

by Carol Bird

### During the stormy, wet spring of 1851

Lydia and Samuel Mather, with their six children, walked from Ohio to Iowa to establish a new home in southwestern Cedar County, near West Branch. They brought with them all that could be carried in an oxcart, as well as some cows, driven for the most part by five-year-old Samuel Jr. Their daughter, Hannah, recorded the journey in her journal, day by day estimating distance covered and route taken. The year before, Samuel Sr., a Quaker of English descent, had purchased their new land because the soil was rich and an ice-cold spring constantly flowed there. In 1852 Samuel Sr. and Jr. planted a large grove of pines to shelter the new family home from winds. From these trees the Mather farmstead later derived its name, "The Evergreens."

The story of the Mather family is almost archetypal in Iowa history. Yet they were unique in that they seemed to have a strong sense of their place and role in history. Today their story is preserved in Special Collections in the State Historical Society of Iowa. Titled the "Mather-Bush Collection," the forty archival storage boxes

A turn-of-the-century picnic.

cover 109 years of family history through photographs, correspondence, business and farm records, manuscripts, and even house plans, scraps of fabric, and inventories of furnishings. The boxes cover nearly twenty feet of metal shelving, yet one can more accurately measure the significance of the collection by noting in this brief synopsis the many ways their family history touches upon common themes in Iowa history.

After farming Evergreens for several years, Samuel Sr. and Lydia divorced in the 1870s and Samuel joined the military. Lydia, whose dowry had originally purchased the Mather land, began to rely primarily on Samuel Jr., by now a young man. Samuel Jr. seems to have been the only son interested in farming. Noted in his community for devotion to his mother and

# History

## Collection



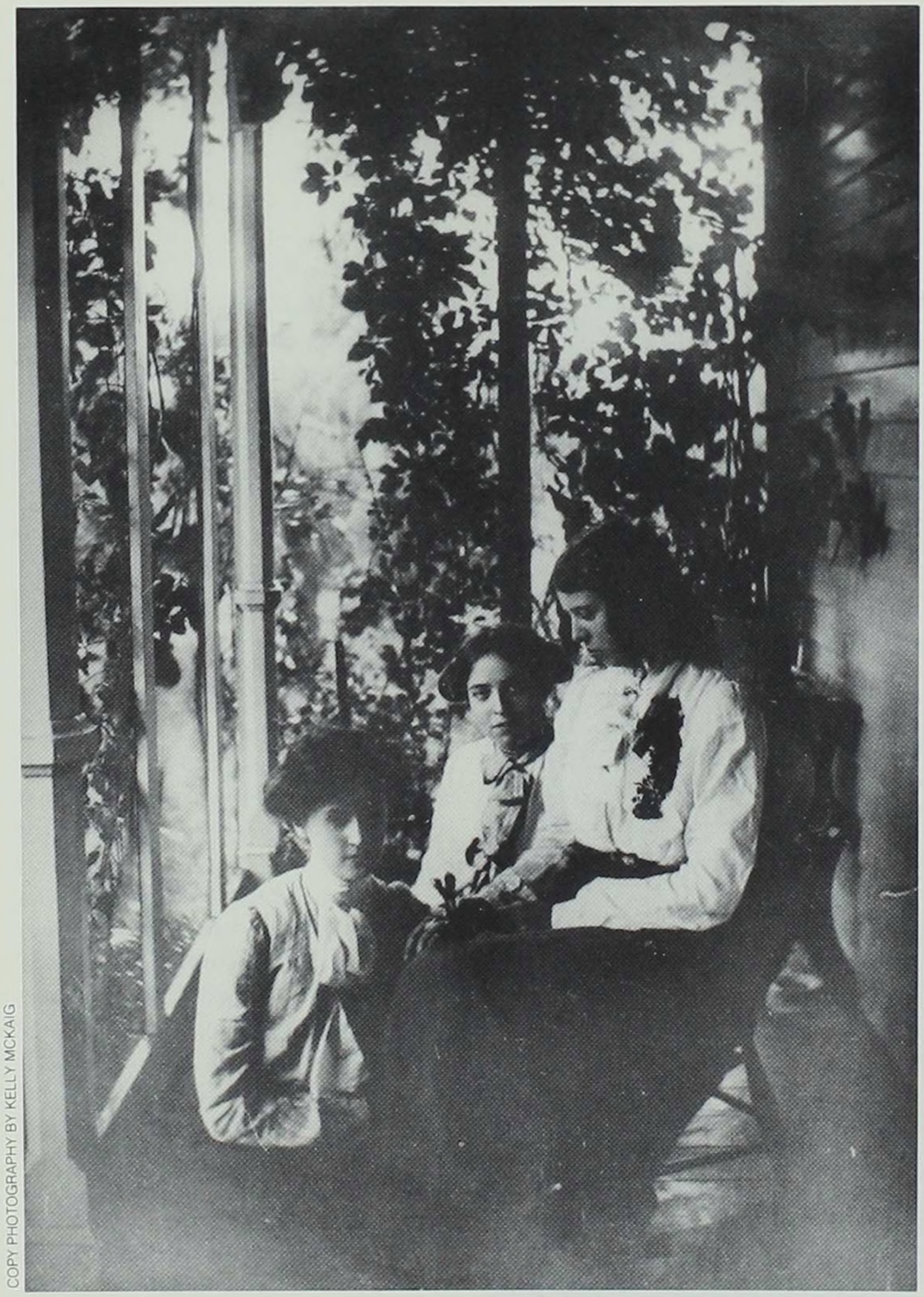
his ability to perform feats of strenuous labor, Samuel took up the responsibilities of Evergreens. Through his industry, he paid for the education and business ventures of his brothers, who wanted to escape farm life. Because of this financial strain, the house and buildings at Evergreens dropped into a state of decay. The walls of the house had to be propped up and great streams of water ran in through the roof during storms.

### *Meanwhile on an Illinois farm, young Ellen*

Knudson reached adulthood. Ellen's background was one of modest wealth, culture, and a streak of unconventionality. Ellen's father encouraged intellectual curiosity in his daughters and provided them with a greater range of experiences than that of most young women of the late nineteenth century. Ellen herself was a passionate, curious person of great natural ability. Though burdened with the charge of younger brothers and sisters at a young age, she read widely, propping her book above her dishpan so that she might read as she washed dishes. At fourteen she had been asked to teach at a local school attended by both children and young men, and she was singularly successful at this and continued to teach into her twenties.

Sometime during 1875, Ellen Knudson traveled to Iowa to visit her friend Ellen Tow, who knew the Mathers. It was at this time that Ellen and Samuel Jr. met. Their courtship was a long one and the affectionate nature of it is only hinted at in their letters. In August 1878 they were married. This wedding marked a renaissance for Evergreens. With money saved from her teaching jobs and inheritance, Ellen purchased an adjacent 160 acres from two of Samuel's brothers.

Ellen's money also built the large, new house at Evergreens in which their six children would be reared. Ellen decorated this house with Brussels carpet, lace curtains, walnut furniture, the best paintings she could find, her music and books and Norwegian china, and, later, two pianos. Ellen's entrance into her husband's sober Quaker community was a stirring one. Ellen Knudson Mather was a phenomenon in the lives of



COPY PHOTOGRAPHY BY KELLY MCKAIG

At Evergreens, sisters Rachel, Jeannette, and Edith Mather pose on a shaded porch. Interior photos reveal details of Victorian furnishings. Rachel (above) plays the piano. Four sisters (below) in a quiet moment.

many, and for those interested in biography, this collection contains several good sketches of both Samuel and Ellen Mather, along with their personal sketches and diaries.

## *Daily and social life at Evergreens is*

well documented in the collection in a series of memoirs written by the entire Mather family. Most of these are childhood memories detailing fascination with the land and water and animals of the farm. In one memoir, for instance, Jeannette Mather Lord writes, "This description fits so exactly the Cedar County whose beauty father and mother loved . . . gently rolling country from hill to valley. There are many wild grapes, oats and much rye. Along the water courses there was wild rice in great abundance, and stately cane and pampas grass. From spring until frost, the eye of the pioneer drank in the beauty of a natural flower garden in every direction to the horizon."

The Mather-Bush Collection also includes over one thousand photographs. These provide additional documentation of life at Evergreens. An invaluable contribution to the collection, the photographs reveal intimate detail the memoirs might have overlooked.

The Mathers were known for their hospitality. Ellen often brought luminaries from nearby State University of Iowa in Iowa City to stay at Evergreens. One memoir mentions that guests could be found at Evergreens at almost any time; on one occasion, during the yearly Quaker meeting, thirty-six people slept under the Mather roof.

Because Ellen Mather's interests reached beyond Evergreens, the collection also holds documents from the Women's Christian Temperance Union, in which she was active for many years. She also served on the Board of Directors of the Benedict Home in Des Moines and was Superintendent of Sabbath Schools for Johnson County.

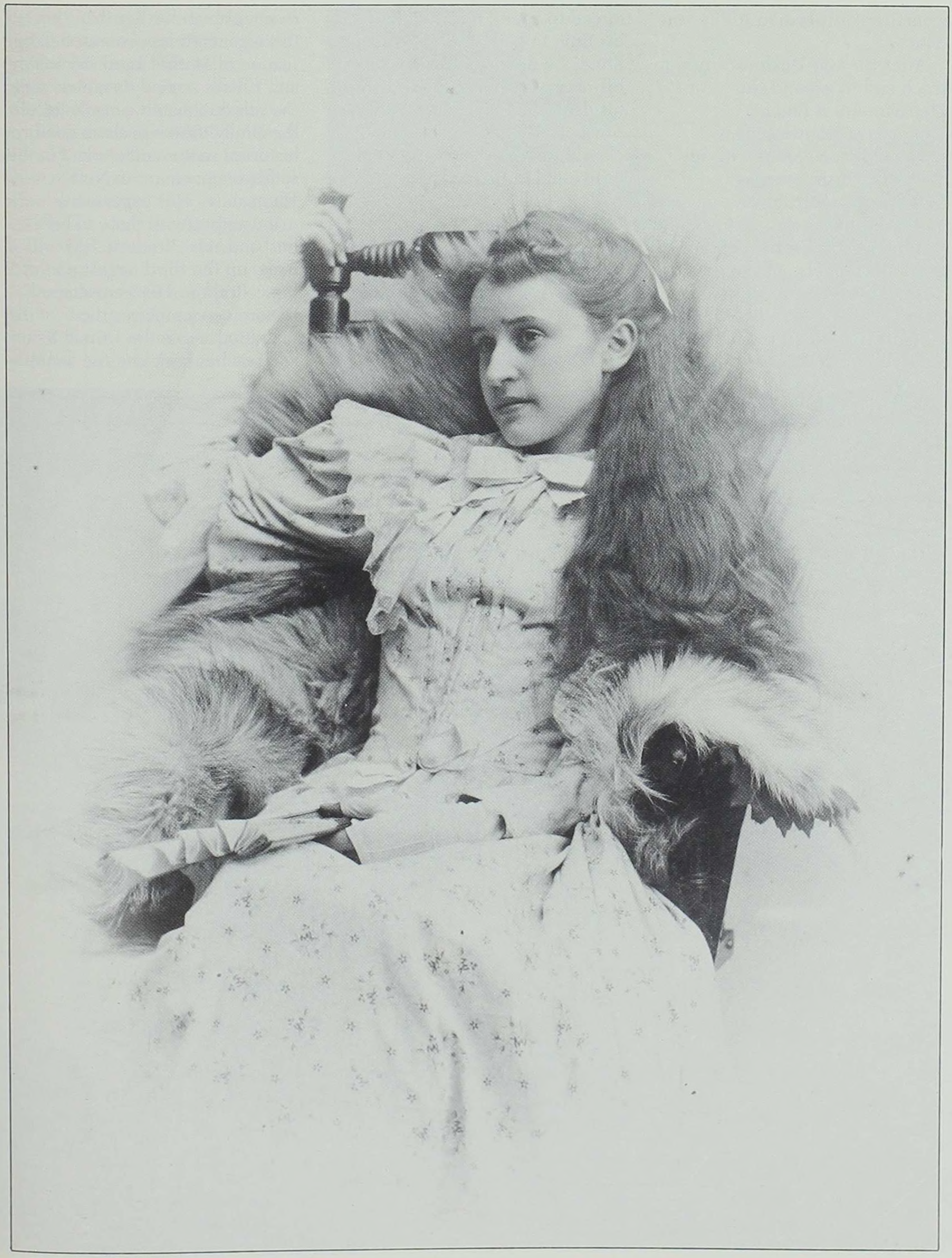
Samuel Mather's reputation as a farmer also grew. A gentle man, he trained his horses and oxen to respond to the sound of his voice rather than to the whip. And to the amazement of his incredulous neighbors, his oxen team won the pulling contest at Iowa State Fair urged on only by words. Samuel's explanation was

that because he had never asked the oxen to pull anything beyond their limit, they knew of nothing they could not draw.

***In 1901 eldest child Rachel Mather, now*** twenty-two, enrolled in a university class in romance languages. Her professor, Stephen Hayes Bush, was a recent Harvard graduate teaching at Iowa because he liked the vitality and growth he saw there. One spring Sunday afternoon Rachel invited her professor to Evergreens, and they fell in love that day, he quoting poetry to her during the carriage ride back to Iowa City. Bush writes about this day and their early married life in Iowa City in his diaries. (The entries, however, are in French and need translation.)

Next to the Mather papers and photographs, the Stephen Hayes Bush papers make up the second largest part of the Mather-Bush Collection. Bush was a prolific diarist, letter writer, and essayist for over fifty years and his papers reveal much about the expanding university, political and scientific issues of the day, and, of course, Bush himself. Chair of the Department of Romance Languages for forty years, Bush also spent much time in Europe forming friendships and academic ties. Because of these connections and his own beliefs, he was deeply troubled by the plight of Europe at the onset of World War I. In 1918, at the age of forty, Bush took sabbatical leave from the university and joined the Moroccan division as a YMCA representative. His diaries include detailed descriptions of the war across the whole of France. At home, Rachel also kept a diary and from it we see some of the American

**Paul Mather (left) takes in the cool shade of the pump house at Evergreens. Right: Rachel Mather (1894?)**



women's contribution to the war effort.

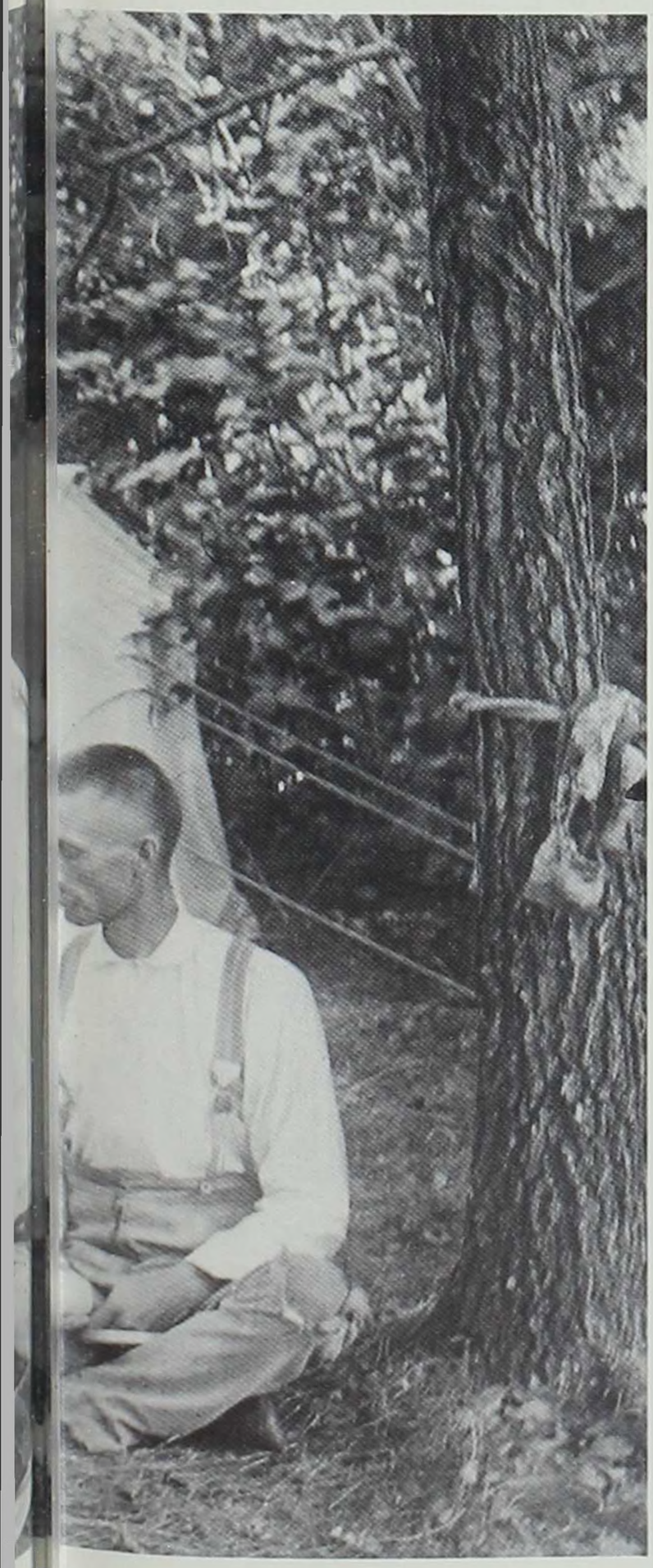
After the war Bush returned to teach and to expand the Department of Romance Languages. Known for his personal involvement with his students, Bush, even as department chair, always insisted on teaching one class of incoming freshmen in order to keep his hand on the pulse of the times. During his fifties Bush was struck with a severe heart ailment. He recovered and returned to teach classes but was forced to spend the remainder of his time in bed. Also increasingly blind, he nevertheless continued his massive correspondence until his death in 1960. These letters present Stephen Bush more clearly than perhaps any other individual in the collection.

*In its entirety the Mather-Bush Collection*

reaches much further than the three generations presented here. Jeannette Mather Lord (Samuel and Ellen's second daughter) was the self-designated genealogist of the family. She was also a good historical writer and worked in the suffrage movement in New Hampshire. Her papers and manuscripts (with those of her husband, Dr. Frederic P. Lord) make up the third largest part of the collection. Her genealogical research encompasses the migration across the United States and reaches back into the family's

Norwegian roots. She and her husband located and visited the original village of her mother's family in Norway. From this research she developed a well written manuscript detailing life in Norway in which one can see some of the reasons immigrants came to America. Her extensive work helps place the Mather family within American and European history.

Though the Mather family was extraordinary in many ways, it is the similarity of their experience with the larger American story



Left: Setting up a camp site. Above: A side view of Evergreens. Family weddings often took place under the trees. Below: Harnessing up.

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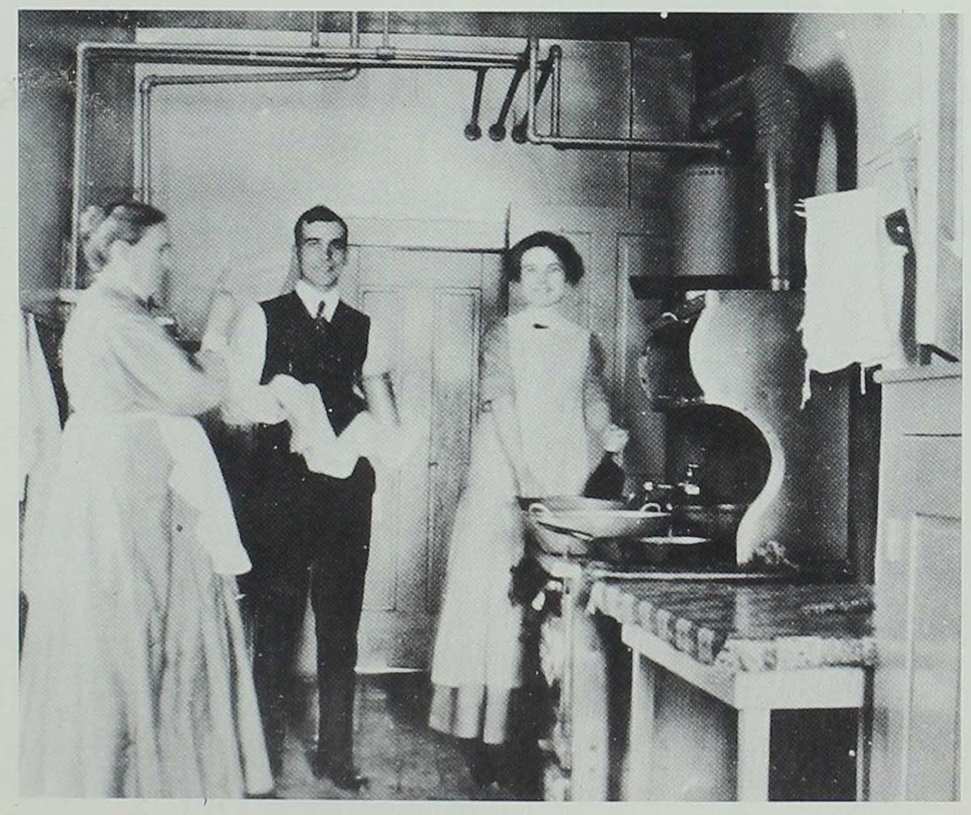
Left: Setting up a camp site. Above: A side view of Evergreens. Family weddings often took place under the trees. Below: Harnessing up.

Upper left: "Discovery of a turtle dove's nest" at Beth's wedding, 1912. Samuel Mather Jr. (far left) and Stephen Bush (far right) flank Edith, Beth, Rachel, and Millicent (Rachel and Stephen's child).

Upper right: Jeannette Mather Lord, who initiated the family history.

Lower left: In the Evergreens kitchen, Ellen Knudson Mather (left) instructs two laughing helpers.

Lower right: Boating on the Cedar River.



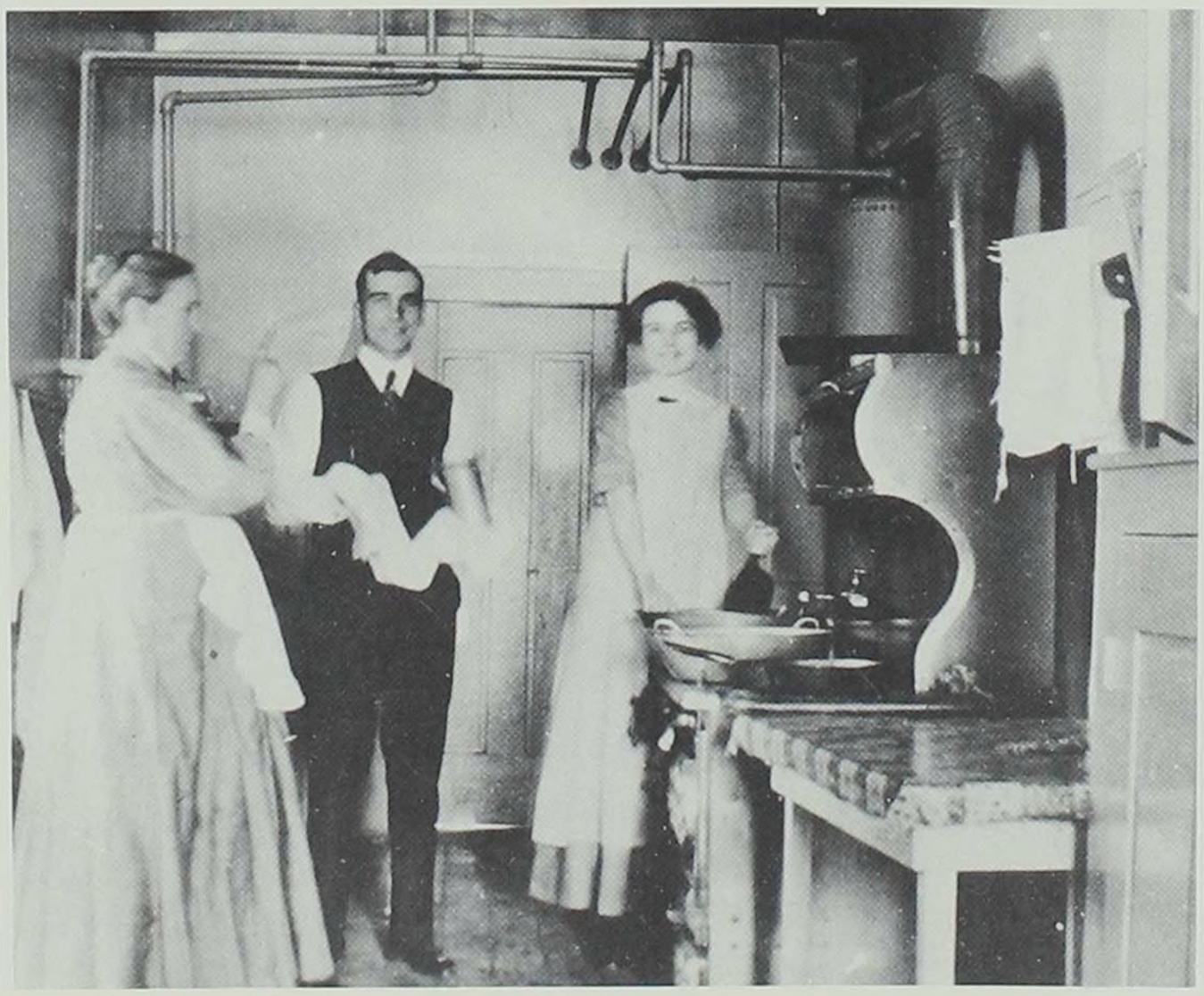
that makes this collection a valuable source for researchers. From Samuel Sr. and Lydia we know of the motivations, struggles, and rewards of pioneering. Samuel Sr. and Jr. labored to develop the land from wilderness and to integrate the new technologies available to the farmers in the early nineteen hundreds. And the later economic struggles of Samuel Jr.'s son Anders to keep Evergreens in the family in 1938 presage things to come. Although Ellen Knudson Mather was of Lutheran/Norwegian descent, she and Samuel followed the Quaker faith and reared their children in this church. Ellen Mather can perhaps be said to have added the culture to this agricultural family. It was she who integrated literature and art into her home and West Branch society, who encouraged dancing and the pursuit of musical training. With the marriage of Rachel to Professor Stephen Bush, the family history enters an academic and international arena through Bush's war experiences and university accomplishments.

From staunch Quaker pioneers to agricultural and intellectual leaders, the Mather story exists as a core sample of Iowa history. The Mathers and Bushes and Lords seemed aware that they played a part in shaping an era and a state and so documented their lives as if with Iowa posterity in mind. □

Upper left: "Discovery of a turtle dove's nest" at Beth's wedding, 1912. Samuel Mather Jr. (far left) and Stephen Bush (far right) flank Edith, Beth, Rachel, and Millicent (Rachel and Stephen's child).

Upper right: Jeannette Mather Lord, who initiated the family history.

Lower left: In the Evergreens kitchen, Ellen Knudson Mather (left) instructs two laughing helpers.



Lower right: Boating on the Cedar River.

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# PHIL STONG'S *Buckskin Breeches*

by Louie W. Attebery

PHILIP DUFFIELD STONG wrote one good novel of the American West, *Buckskin Breeches* (1937). The time has surely come to attempt to show where the book may be placed in the canon of America's western literature, to point out strengths of the work, and to consider Stong's notion of history and its uses.

Phil Stong was born in Keosauqua, Iowa, in 1899, and died of a heart attack one April day in 1957 in Washington, Connecticut. Between those dates he was a football player, a B.A. graduate from Drake University, a dropout from the English graduate program of Columbia University, a high school teacher and coach, an editor for Associated Press, a successful novelist and scenario writer whose *State Fair* (1932) has been standard fare for Hollywood and the musical stage. He was also, say literary biographers Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, a socialist and a Knight Templar.

*Buckskin Breeches* opens in the state of Ohio and concludes in what was then Wisconsin Territory but is now Iowa (specifically, Van Buren County). Although the book is about what we today geographically call the "Midwest," by its historical content it is a western novel. Any book set in the time and place of settlement moving east to west can lay claim to being a western novel. In 1837 Iowa represented that frontier, that line of settlement beyond which lay the American West.

More specifically, Stong's novel is a *regional* western novel, a category less submissive to definition. H.G. Merriam (former English department head and editor of *Frontier and Midland* at the University of Montana) used to say that it has taken in each instance about a hundred years for a region to emerge. Settlement, civilization, and self-conscious awareness of itself might summarize the evolution of a region. In that third component — self-conscious awareness — is the production of a regional literature, and the writers who produce it have most often been attracted to the region's history for their subjects. In *Buckskin Breeches* and such lesser novels as *Ivanhoe Keeler*, Phil Stong is a regional novelist treating frontier materials — in this case, Iowa of 1837. In works like *State Fair* and its sequel *Return in August* (1935), he is a *regionalist* using contemporary materials.

*Buckskin Breeches* is a good book. It has a strong narrative line, engaging readers in the action of the story by making them wish to know what is coming next. It features a well-conceived plot, encouraging the reader to ask why these things happen. Most of the cast are well conceived, and even some of the minor flattish figures are memorable. A final merit of the book emerges through the advancement of our understanding of Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis while Stong develops and clarifies his own theory of history.

The story is of Jesse and Margaret Ellison and their four children; they keep a tavern in Ohio through the generosity — or indulgence — of Margaret's father in civilized Cincinnati. Jesse decides to move west, way out to the Ioway section of Wisconsin Territory, practically virgin land. They join another couple in making the trek and also become the surrogate family for the young, pregnant Georgine Pickett when her husband goes ahead of the others in order to put up a cabin, claim some land, and

do the necessary work to set up a mill. Old Eli Ledom, a Revolutionary War and War of 1812 veteran and Indian-fighting sidekick of Jesse's, is told that at seventy-three he is too old to go. He goes anyway. The move is accomplished in the fall with some hardship and great fatigue, the claims are marked, and Ioway is established. A threat by land speculators to buy the now mapped and improved land is thwarted when the settlers, a mixed group from various sections of America as well as from northern Europe, bid on their own parcels of land at public auction at $1.25 an acre.

To write of the Iowa frontier of the 1830s is to include Indians, of course. Stong's Indians emerge as marginal, somewhere between the hostility of the clearly remembered Black Hawk and the acculturation of the post-statehood period. The threat of a massacre, although old Eli is hard to convince at first, is reduced to a series of fist fights between ten-year-old Hi Ellison and his young Indian buddies, to whom he introduces fisticuffs. Thus the

**In 1837 Iowa represented that frontier, that line of settlement beyond which lay the American West.**

feared massacre is no more than black eyes and bloody noses.

Stong creates suspense and invents scenes, difficulties, and conflicts that are convincing. One such scene occurs in the Ohio tavern as a slave catcher notices the beauty of Martha the maid, who is mixing him an eggnog.

> She put the bowl down and arranged the napkins and the cups and prepared to serve the men. Still the Southerner's gaze never left her face. She blushed but went on. She finished and curtsied and then the bull-necked man's fist shot out and his fingers clutched her wrist brutally. He glanced at the nails, stared into her eyes.
>
> "Nigger," he hazarded, "where did you run away from?"
>
> Every sound in the barroom stopped. Jesse was out and at the table in an instant. He struck the man's arm at the point of the elbow with his open hand, grinding the joint back on its own cartilage, so that the Southerner bellowed and released Martha.

The slave catcher pulls one of the new revolvers on Jesse, who tries to make it plain that the girl is legally free. After giving three warnings, Jesse acts in concert with Old Eli:

> There were no more words. Eli and Jesse glanced at each other and the two knives flew together. Eli was old and his knife drove in above the wrist, hung for a moment and dropped to the floor, but Jesse's blade, in its last, venomous arc, lodged exactly between the middle bones of the hand and quivered there.
>
> The man said, "Hunnh!" in surprise. Eli picked up the pistol and began to examine it, curiously, without glancing up when Jesse returned his knife to him.

It is one of many scenes that cinematography could do much with, as are the two following. In the first, it is clear that there is a rift between Jesse and Margaret as Jesse has just called the Reverend Elmer Spence Newton a subjackass:

> "He had a call to do God's work. You know more than God?"
>
> The serenity and amusement of Jesse's face as he lighted his pipe quieted her to fury.
>
> "Yes," said Jesse, "if God taught him the Greek he was showing off with one Sunday. Pretty bad."
>
> "You know so much — !" She saw his cold, unmoved face and hesitated, then went on. "He's a minister of the gospel and you're running a tavern."
>
> "Yes — yes, that's true. It's good of you to remind me that I haven't touched bottom yet."

In the other scene, Jesse is on his knees, scrubbing the tobacco-stained tavern floor, for he tries to spare his children the more noisome tasks associated with tavern-keeping:

> Then [Jesse] rose quickly and impatiently, without touching his hands to this sewer, and went on with his mop.
>
> He looked up when the door squeaked. . . . Which one would this be?

"Hi! I thought you were in bed three hours ago."

The youngster did not pause. "I hadda go somewhere." He made for the stairs, weaving a trifle as he went. He caught the post and pulled himself up the first step.

"Hi — come here."

The boy paused. "All right, papa. But I'm sleepy." He waited to be dismissed on this plea. He could explain everything — later.

. . .

Jesse bent until his nose could catch the boy's breath. "It made you sick, uh?"

"I feel all right, daddy."

Jesse lifted his brows and smiled but his heart was cold and lifeless as a rock. "You threw it up."

"Threw what, father?"

"The whisky."

Hiram nodded. He could strain his trained honesty a trifle but not enough to make the effort useful. "All of us did. Gee, we all thought we'd die. Duffy Hitchcock — he kept going 'oop — oop — oop' for about an hour after he'd got through."

As for struggles and conflicts, Stong creates several of them and several kinds of them. There is the struggle overland, through forests and mud, rising streams, and snowdrifts.

**The moral energy of the book develops from the struggles within and between characters.**

There is the struggle to clear the land and bring it into production. There is the struggle against cold and hunger, setting in motion the traditional frontier provisioning processes. And these are all well done, convincing and real. But the moral energy of the book develops from the struggles within and between characters, particularly in respect to that time-honored element in human relationships — love. In an amazing display of geometry, Stong develops six sets of triangles of varying degrees of intensity. A brief identification of a few of the characters is necessary to make this business of love triangles clear.

Jesse, forty-six and white-haired, resembles Old Hickory. Under other circumstances he would have gravitated to a college, for he has a good knowledge of Greek and Latin and reads widely. He is proficient with all the frontier weapons. His past is blighted, for although he fought the British in 1812, his father had been a New York Tory in 1775. Margaret Garrison Ellison knows the temptations of social climbing and whist playing but is intelligent and a good mother to their four children, two of whom seem to favor the Ellisons and two of whom are Garrisons.

David, the oldest son, is nineteen and gray-eyed, like his father. At seventeen, Susan is part style-conscious adolescent and part flirtatious woman who keeps an itinerant musician named Ivanhoe Keeler dangling. Teddy is fourteen, a gentle and somewhat shy Garrison. Hiram at ten is an Ellison, profane, intelligent (recall how he used all the terms of paternal address in an attempt to blunt what he feared would be Jesse's wrath — papa, daddy, father), and bellicose. His frequent black eyes conceal that he is victor more often than loser.

Eli Ledom hates Indians. Dangerous with rifle and knife, he had fought the notorious Simon Girty (a Loyalist who had led war parties against other American frontier settlers). Like Natty Bumppo, Eli is unmarried, though his chastity is open to question. His name is an anagram for *model*, and he is wise and venerable, though impulsive. The Reverend Newton is an eastern minister with advanced ideas and, in Jesse's opinion, backward Greek. Ella Bauer, the town's loose woman, dallies with David. Julia Drummond is the daughter of emigrants whom the Ellisons meet on the way to Ioway. Caesar Crawford and his family settle near the Ellisons. Of the rest of the cast I shall mention only Samuel Carpenter, a man of means who becomes the benefactor of Georgine and Leland Pickett, though otherwise he is a misanthrope who has moved to the West because he was "tired of living with bastards."

But let's look briefly at the triangles. Triangle One: Through much of the book Jesse and Margaret are estranged. Into this void Martha, the maid, would like to step, but her innate decency and Jesse's morality make this triangle potential rather than real. There is no question of Martha's devotion to Jesse, which

Stong's theme is the desire to salvage integrity by withdrawing from the known and comfortable and making a new beginning in the West.

she proves when Jesse outlines a future for her that does not include her accompanying the party to Iowa. In rejecting life without Jesse, the maid stabs herself and dies with his kiss on her lips. Triangle Two: Margaret is attracted to the Reverend Newton, and he pleads for her to run away with him, considering the same two choices of escape that occurred to Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale — the land beyond settlement or a return to the East. Triangle Three: Another three-part tension develops when Margaret is temporarily hostile to the attentions a visiting Boston girl begins to show to the Reverend. He, in turn, ponders Miss Apperson's attractiveness — and Boston position — but rejects her because Margaret Ellison is the object of his passion. But Margaret sincerely loves Jesse, so this triangle, too, remains potential.

Triangle Four: David's involvement with Ella Bauer, whom I have uncharitably called a loose woman, however, is kinetic: it is real, not merely potential. Reluctantly, Ella decides she prefers David's rival for her favors because the rival, though not the lover David is, will inherit the tannery. Frontier sex is well managed here, particularly in one scene in which Ella seduces David. Later, while on the migration, David bitterly reflects on his father's rejection of Ella as a possible daughter-in-law, for David's first encounter with sex has made him vulnerable to her charms. Another wagon joins the little group, and Triangle Five appears in the form of a shy, pale girl, Julia Drummond, who is not without a feminine wisdom of her own. She wins David partly by her quiet strength but partly by her naked foot glimpsed in the firelight.

The final triangle is provided by Susan Ellison, Ivanhoe Keeler, and Caesar Crawford. It is broken when she rejects the musician and chooses Caesar, a neighbor lad of great promise.

The tension generated by these relationships and the manner in which those passions are managed contribute to the general theme Stong is advancing. That theme may be stated as the desire of a man to salvage the integrity of himself and his family by withdrawing from the known and comfortable and making a new beginning in the West. Withdrawal is thus a strategy for advancement. This general theme divides itself into five subthemes, as Jesse's motives for moving west are clarified: (1) to get his youngsters away from the baleful influences of the tavern and tavern life; (2) to get out from under the father-in-law and become his own man; (3) to make a start for himself and realize ambitions that had earlier almost driven him to Texas; (4) to heal the breach between himself and Margaret; and (5) to take part in the growth of the soil and the development of a free and spacious land.

The book is not blatantly heroic or sententiously moral. Stong's memorable scene of Old

"If history is anything," Stong writes, "it is not a record, as has been reported; it is something intimately connected with our lives."

Eli's death following a stroke contrasts sharply with James Fenimore Cooper's artificial and sentimentalistic manner of the Trapper's death in *The Prairie*. Eli has already earned so much admiration from River Heron and Big Mouth and Ground Hog through his collection of scalps that, almost against his will, he has been reconciled to his Indian admirers and adopted by Ground Hog. With Eli on his death bed, Stong writes:

> They sat for a little while and then the door opened and Big Mouth and River Heron

appeared and filled it. They ignored everyone in the room but Eli and went straight to him. Big Mouth looked at him attentively and then spoke in the clear English which he would never confess.

"It is the time, brother."

"Yes, it's the time."

Big Mouth picked up one of the helpless arms and dropped it again. "We see that you are bound. You will soon be free. You will be young. Your knives will flash again. Soon, you and I will dance again."

"And I'll dance better — I'll know the songs. But I'll show you."

Then arrangements for the medicine bundle are made as Big Mouth says:

> "This you must take with you. . . . The Little White Buffalo will know you then. All the manitous will know you. The Great Manitou will be happy that you are there."
>
> "That's right," said Eli, "that's good. Well, good-bye."
>
> "Good-bye." The tall, wrinkled chieftains left the cabin.
>
> Eli's eyes were closing for the last coma. "Oh, Manitou —"
>
> Margaret knew and pitied him. "To Jesus, Eli."
>
> "Jesus is an Easterner," said Eli. "Oh, Manitou —"

"History should be taught as a part of life — this life, now, not a strange little English-American fellow cutting up a cherry tree."

Finally, there is the problem of history. If scholars of Stong are few, judging by their output, one useful resource is available and that is his autobiography, *If School Keeps*. From this volume the reader learns many things: that Stong was a bright student, prone to black eyes, who skipped a grade in elementary school; that World War I cost him a close friend; that John Towner Frederick's *The Midland* (a pioneering Iowa regional journal later absorbed by H.G. Merriam's *Frontier*, thenceforth called *Frontier and Midland*) published young Stong; and that history has its uses. Stong says in the autobiography:

> If history is anything it is not a record, as has been reported; it is something intimately connected with our lives; so far as it exists at all it must necessarily lie on the time-point of the present; it is not merely connected to what we believe and live and do. . . .
>
> The first and only importance of history is its application to immediate and intimate life.

And again he says:

> If history is not related to life it is useless; if it is related to life it should be taught as a part of life — this life, now, not a strange little English-American fellow cutting up a cherry tree. . . . History disregards the inherent dignity of the individual; that is why it ignores our only vulgate, the truth, and why we have to attack history from roundabout directions, searching through strange paths, through psycho-pathology, through such remote materials as rocks and trees to find out what we are.

And what, we may ask of this writer, *are* twentieth-century Iowans? They are representative of the mulligan stew that is America, not part of a homogenized chicken soup but lumps and globs and liquids of this and that, not totally assimilated. Passion, violence, work, fatigue, endurance, and hope are a few of the human constants connecting today's Iowans with the Ellisons and their neighbors. And if Stong did not invent these insights, he has assuredly given them a memorable and satisfying expression. □

### NOTE ON SOURCES

There is a paucity of scholarship on this interesting Iowa writer. Kunitz and Haycraft offer neat summaries of Stong's life and works in *Twentieth Century Authors. Iowa: A Guide to the Hawkeye State*, compiled by the Federal Writers' Project of the WPA in 1938, has only a paragraph on him. The curious reader will note Stong's informal and highly entertaining autobiography, *If School Keeps* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1940), excerpted in this essay, and his casual and equally entertaining *Hawkeyes: A Biography of the State of Iowa* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1940). Farrar & Rinehart published *Buckskin Breeches*, also excerpted here.

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*compiled by John Melvin and Paul Stolt*


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## SUBMISSIONS

The editor welcomes manuscripts and edited documents on the history of Iowa and the Midwest that may interest a general reading audience. Submissions that focus on visual material (photographs, maps, drawings) or on material culture are also invited. Originality and significance of the topic, as well as the quality of research and writing, will determine acceptance for publication. Manuscripts should be typewritten, double-spaced, and follow *The Chicago Manual of Style* (13th edition). Standard length is within ten to twenty manuscript pages, but shorter or longer submissions will be considered. Include a list of sources used and a brief biographical sketch. Because illustrative material is integral to the *Palimpsest*, the editor encourages authors to include photographs and illustrations (or suggestions). Please send submissions or queries to Ginalie Swaim, Editor, *The Palimpsest*, State Historical Society of Iowa, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240.

## LETTERS FROM READERS

***Cedar Rapids Banks***

Fred Everett's query [in the Summer *Palimpsest*, "Letters from Readers"] about the American Trust and Savings Bank's conversion to the Merchants National Bank Building must be answered with a firm "No." The bank shown in the photo accompanying my article on Cedar Rapids [in the Roaring Twenties, Spring issue] is on the southwest corner of First Avenue and Second Street East. The Merchants National Bank Building is on the northwest corner of Second Avenue and Third Street East. My article mentioned the building of the MNB Building in the 1920s. Both buildings still stand.

**Clarence Andrews, Iowa City**

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**The *Palimpsest* welcomes letters from its readers. Please include your complete address and phone number. Letters that are published may be edited for clarity and brevity. Write: Editor, *Palimpsest*, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa 52240.**

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